

# Beadle's BOY'S LIBRARY of Sport, Story and Adventure

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No. 3.

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Vol. I.

KIT CARSON,  
KING OF GUIDES. By Albert W. Aiken.



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DANGER AHEAD!

# Kit Carson,

## KING OF GUIDES;

OR,

### Mountain Paths and Prairie Trails.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN.

#### CHAPTER I. ON THE SOUTHERN TRAIL.

"INJUNS, by thunder!"

The exclamation came from the leader of a score of bearded, weather-beaten men, all dressed in the prairie garb of buckskin, and armed to the teeth, who had halted to take a noon bite under the shadows of the Mesa Los Lobos, as the old small irregular mountain range, due west of the city of Santa Fe, the capital of New Mexico, is called.

The little party were on a trapping excursion, bound for the head-waters of the Little Colorado river, then a very paradise for game of all descriptions.

We are writing of the far-off days when New Mexico was under Mexican rule, and before the northern eagle, flapping his broad wings in triumph, had taken possession of the land.

The trappers were all Americans, the Mexicans as a race being too indolent to encounter the toils and perils of such a life.

It was a strong party, although few in numbers, but as they were all picked men, splendidly armed and well used to Indian warfare, they felt satisfied that they could give a good account of any ordinary band of red-skins.

The country watered by the main stream of the Little Colorado—the Chiquito Colorado of the Mexicans—was not the safest land in the world for white men to wander over.

On the north was the warlike Navajo tribe, and on the south the equally redoubtable Apaches, both of which nations looked with jealous eyes upon the intrusion of white men into their beautiful wilderness, but as the country was famous for its fur-bearing animals, despite the savage red-skins the white trappers would risk their scalps in trapping along the clear mountain streams.

The leader of this expedition was a veteran trader and trapper of vast experience; in fact, Bob McKnight, as he was generally called, was reputed to be as well posted in all matters appertaining to wood and prairie craft as any man along the whole line of the frontier.

Being only three days out from Santa Fe, the party had never given the Indians a thought, for not until after they had turned southward and passed the Zuni ruins was there any danger of encountering the savages, for the red-skins rarely came so far to the north-west.

But McKnight was one of those men whose eyes were always on the alert, and while his companions were busily engaged in munching their coarse food and bandying their well-worn jests, he had been surveying the distant horizon, and had discovered in the distance a slight

speck, showing black against the sky, which the well-trained eyes instantly detected was a horse and rider, and as in that prairie wilderness, the stranger, as a rule was a red-skin and a foe, it was not strange that the veteran uttered the warning cry.

At the note of alarm every man was on his feet in a twinkling and grasped his weapons, and all eyes were turned in the direction in which McKnight was gazing.

"It is only a single man, boys," the veteran observed. "I reckoned when I first see'd him that he was a kind of a scout on ahead of the main body, but the rest on 'em don't seem to show up."

No need of glasses for these keen-eyed men with hawk-like vision, trained by years of experience to distinguish the smallest object afar, and they all nodded their heads, for they agreed with their leader that there was only a single man in sight.

"Mebbe he's coming on a smelling expedition fur to find out ef we air worth going fur," suggested one of the old grizzled veterans of the train.

"Like as not," said another, and then they all wagged their heads thoughtfully and looked at the horses, which were tethered together and feeding on the luxuriant prairie grass.

In an Indian attack it is always the red-skins' policy to stampede and drive off the horses first, then, deprived of their animals and of the means of retreating, the chances are greatly in favor of the savages succeeding in exterminating the pale-face intruders.

"Wa-al, durn me if it ain't a white man!" cried McKnight, suddenly. His experienced eyes had detected that the new-comer was riding in an altogether different manner from that practiced by the Indians.

"Kinder keerless of his sculp, 'pears to me," remarked the grizzled trapper before mentioned.

"Mighty little feller too; some rat of a younger who has cut his lucky and made a run of it from his dad and mam, I'll bet a cookey!" the leader observed.

Satisfied that there wasn't any danger to be apprehended, the trappers resumed their eating again and stretched themselves out upon the grass in their former lazy position.

The rider came up; he was a lad, small in stature, with clear gray-blue eyes, light yellow hair and an honest, expressive face; being small in build he did not look to be over fifteen, but from the settled expression upon his face one gifted in reading ages would have taken him to be three or four years older than that.

He was dressed in a complete suit of buckskin and well armed, a rifle being slung across his back, a couple of double-barreled pistols stuck in his belt and balanced on the other side by a superb hunting-knife.

"I would like to speak to Captain McKnight, if you please," he said, pulling his horse up and halting by the side of the party.

There was something pleasant about the clear, manly tones of the boy's voice, and McKnight, who prided himself upon being a judge of character was favorably impressed.

"I'm Captain McKnight," he said, advancing

a few steps so as to get a better look at the youth; "what kin I do fur you?"

"I want to join your party, if you please, sir."

A couple of the trappers who were not renowned for their good manners, laughed coarsely at this announcement and one of them, John Walters by name, generally called "Big-mouthed John," from the enormous size of his "kissing trap," as he usually termed it, cried out:

"Say, sonny, what do you s'pose we want with such kids as you along with our outfit? Go home, for your mammy knows yer out!"

A slight bit of color rose in the boy's face and there was a glint of fire in his cold, calm eyes, but he did not answer the burly fellow, quietly ignoring him altogether and looking to McKnight for an answer.

"Wa-al, my boy, you are almost too young to go with us, for we are going into the land of the red-skins with our very lives in our hands. But who are you, anyway, and where do you come from?" the captain asked, his manner kind and courteous.

"My name is Christopher Carson, sir, Kit Carson for short. I was born in Madison county, Kentucky, but when I was only a baby my folks emigrated to Upper Louisiana and I was taught by my father, who was as good a woodman as all Kentuck could boast, how to read the signs in the forest and on the prairie, how to handle weapons and take care of myself in any situation, and from the time I was a little boy I have always wanted to be a trapper and a prairie-guide, and so with my father's permission I have set out to make my own way in the world. I have been all winter with a trapper in the mountains, Kincade, perhaps some of you may know him?"

A half-a-dozen of the party nodded assent, among them McKnight; Kincade was a man well known and possessing an excellent reputation.

"He taught me Spanish so that I can speak it like a native, so, if you need an interpreter when you come to trade with the Mexicans I think I can fill the bill," the lad continued. "And as to trapping, I have been at it all winter, and Kincade says that I know nearly as much about it now as he does, and I s'pose, sir, you know that he is counted to be as good a trapper as any man that ever took a pelt in the West."

Again quite a number in the party nodded, and murmured exclamations of "That's so;" "Sure as yer born!" and such like expressions came from the adventurers.

"I know that I am not as old as I might be," the boy went on, rather encouraged by the friendly looks which he noticed on the faces of some of the party, "but my father used to say when he set out to teach me anything that I would never learn younger and it is a fault that will grow less and less every day, so, gentlemen, I hope you will give me a chance for my white ally."

The quiet humor in the speech made the majority of the party smile, and McKnight whose first favorable impression had become stronger and stronger as the boy went on, was inclined to take the boy along provided the rest were willing.

"For my part I don't see any particular objection," he remarked, addressing the others. "The boy isn't a man, that's true, but he seems like a tough little cuss and I have an idea that in a scrimmage he would be able to give a good account of himself. How does it pear to you, boys?"

"Oh, we don't want the younker, nary time!" cried Big-mouthed John, loudly. "We ain't a-going on a picnic, but right in whar we'll hev' to fight Injuns thicker'n' skeeters in an Arkansaw swamp. Nice howl this little cuss would set up if he see'd a painted red-skin coming for his top knot!"

"I'll back my nerve 'gainst yours, sir, any-time," young Carson cried.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE TRIAL.

"THE blazes you will!" the rough fellow growled, astonished and "mad" at being challenged thus quickly and directly.

"Yes, sir, I said it and I will stick to it!" the boy replied, with firm accent.

"Bully for you, youngster!" cried the gray-bearded veteran. "That is what I like to see. You've got grit you hev, and I like grit in everything except a long-tailed clam."

"Oh, you are only shooting your mouth off for fun!" the angry trapper exclaimed, incensed at the mirth plainly visible on the faces of his comrades, who were delighted at seeing the chronic bully and braggard of the camp bluffed by a boy.

"Put it to the test and you will quickly find out whether I am in earnest or not," Carson remarked, his blue eyes gleaming and firm resolution plainly visible upon his clear-cut features. "If I haven't got grit then I ain't the kind of boy you're looking for."

"Wa-al, may I be 'tarnally jammed into a cocked hat ef you ain't the sassiest leetle cuss I ever run across!" Big-mouthed John exclaimed. "W'at kin you do, anyway?"

"What ought I to be able to do?" was the boy's shrewd retort, thus plainly proving that in wit he was more than a match for the big fellow.

"Kin you shute?"

"I can."

"Hit the side of a house if it is near enough!" sneered the ugly-minded trapper.

"Hit anything that you can."

"You dursn't come that old trick that the cuss did w'ot you read 'bout in the story-books."

"What was that?" asked the boy, whose education had been somewhat neglected, as the necessity of the times had forced him to pay diligent attention to things more important on the frontier than books.

"I bet you would be skeetered to shute an apple off on my head at a hundred paces with that rifle of yours!"

"No, I wouldn't," replied young Carson, instantly. "Get your apple and step out; I am not at all afraid of the trial."

"But I reckon I am!" blurted out the trapper, perceiving too late that he had put his foot into it. "Gol durn it! ef you missed the apple, you mought plug me!"

"Well, that's your look-out; you proposed it

yourself, and if I hit you I stand ready to apologize as a gentleman should."

There was a general laugh at this sally, and a half dozen or more hurled gibes at the braggart until he got red with rage.

"What do you durst to do, anyway?" he cried.

"Any gentleman in the party got two plugs of 'nigger-head' 'bout six or eight inches long?"

Few of the trappers were there present who could not boast of a good big plug of the favorite brand of tobacco common to the borderland, known as "nigger-head," as they were all fresh from a town, and a half-dozen pieces were produced and tendered to the lad.

He dismounted from his steed and selected two that were nearly of a size; then addressing himself to the trapper, he said:

"Are you a good pistol-shot?"

Now this was exactly what the other prided himself upon, and he really was a very good shot, and had won many wagers from his companions by shooting corks out of bottles, extinguishing candles and similar tricks, and now when the boy inquired as to his skill with the pistol, he surmised that he was about to propose somefeat at arms, but what on earth he wanted with the plugs of tobacco was a mystery.

"Kin I shute with a pistole!" he cried, putting his tongue in his cheek and winking at his companions. "Wa-al, I reckon I kin, if it is loaded all right."

"You are the man called Big-mouthed John?" said the boy, abruptly.

"Say, you ain't bin introduced to me yet, and you mustn't be so 'tarnally familiar."

"Oh, I know you by your description, for when I was told in Santa Fe that this would be a good party for me to join, they said you were with it."

"Sonny, I guess you've got the right pig by the ear; I reckon that I will have to own up to my handle; they call me that 'cos I'm such a handsom cuss!" and then the trapper grinned in such a fearful way that it seemed as if half of his head was off.

"And they say you are the best pistol-shot west of the Mississippi."

"Tolerable, tolerable, sonny," responded the big fellow, swelling with arrogance despite his assumed modesty.

"I can shoot a little myself," the boy remarked; "but it is not only my skill but my courage that you want to test, and in order to show you whether I possess both or am lacking in either, I propose that you take a plug of tobacco in the left hand, which you are to hold up on a level with your head, with your pistol cocked in your right hand, and I will do the same; then we will stand at a dozen paces apart and fire at the plug."

"I'll see you in blazes furst!" growled the trapper, in disgust. "Do you s'pose I'm going to risk my life in that way? How kin I tell that you are able to hit the side of a barn?—mebbe you never fired a pistole in yer life; why, dog-gone it, the chance is a hundred to one that you would hit me 'stead of the tobacco."

"I am sorry that you doubt my ability," the boy replied. "Now, I have perfect confidence

in your skill, and I am willing to give you the first shot; that will prove my grit anyway."

"An' you will stand up at a dozen paces an' hold the plug of tobacco for me?" cried Big-mouthed John, getting decidedly interested.

"I will."

"You dursn't! yer only gassin'!"

For answer Carson took one of the plugs, paced off a dozen strides, held up the article in his left hand and cried:

"I'm ready; are you? Fire!"

John hesitated, and the rest noticing it, at once began to jeer him.

"Taking water!" cried one.

"Crawfishin', by gum!" yelled a second.

"He don't dar' to do it!" said a third.

"Send him back to Santa Fe and take the boy along; he's got the most grit of the two, you bet," suggested another.

This banter was too much for the trapper, who was noted for flying into a passion upon very small provocation.

"Now you jest shut up your mouths!" he yelled, in a rage. "I'm no darned fool, and though this little chap is too pert and sarcy to live long, yet I ain't anxious to hurry him out of the world. It's too big a risk, and I don't want his blood on my head."

"There isn't any danger if you know how to shoot; but if you don't, why you had better say so at once and have done with it," the boy remarked, as cool as a cucumber.

There was a general laugh at this remark, and the trapper, terribly excited and angry, snatched his pistol from his belt, took deliberate aim at the mark held aloft so bravely by the courageous boy, and fired.

The crowd drew a long breath, and then a dozen at least jumped forward to examine the tobacco.

"I think the shot missed, gentlemen," the lad remarked, "for I didn't feel it move in the least."

And so it proved upon examination. The crack shot of the border, his nerves unstrung by the excitement of the scene, had missed the simple shot, which under other circumstances he could have accomplished ninety-nine times out of a hundred.

"Now it is my turn," Carson said, giving back the tobacco to the trapper from whom he had received it, drawing one of the double-barreled pistols from his belt and raising the hammer with cool deliberation.

John stared at him; his dull brain still further befogged by the signal failure which he had just made, did not comprehend what the boy was up to.

"Come, I am ready!" the boy cried.

"Ready for what?" asked John, sulkily.

"For my shot, of course."

"Your shot?"

"Yes; hold up your tobacco."

"Nary time!" responded the other, shoving both hands deep down into the pockets of his hunting-shirt, and glaring doggedly at the other.

"Gentlemen, I appeal to the crowd, isn't it my right now to claim my shot when I gave him his and received his fire without wincing?"

There was no disputing the justice of the

boy's claim, and the crowd, without a dissenting voice, proclaimed that it was only fair that Big-mouth John should hold up the target.

"But a man to do that is a-risking his life!" the trapper protested.

"The boy did it," Captain McKnight replied, quietly but firmly, "and judging from your failure to hit the tobacco he exposed himself to considerable danger by so doing. Anyway, neither you nor any other man in this outfit has any right to question the courage of the lad after the exhibition that we have witnessed."

All the rest unanimously agreed to this.

"And, partner, you had no right to take the shot if you didn't mean to give the boy a show in return."

"Well, I won't and that's flat; and since you're all so taken with this cheeky cuss, why, I'll step out and you kin have him in my place!" the trapper cried in anger, then he mounted his horse and rode off amid the jeers of the rest.

"I'll hold the tobacco for you!" the captain cried.

"No danger, sir," the lad responded, and no more there wasn't for our young hero sent his bullet through it at the first trial.

And so it happened that Kit Carson, although but a boy in years joined McKnight's outfit and was rated as being equal to a man.

### CHAPTER III. IN THE INDIAN COUNTRY.

THE trappers pursued their way southward, redoubling their caution as they advanced until after they had passed the ruins of the old Zuni village on the head-waters of the Flax river, then being out of the country of the renowned Navajoes, the bravest of all the southern tribes, they made better progress.

In the Navajo country it had been McKnight's custom to rest by day and march by night. Being well posted in regard to the lay of the land and favored by moonlight nights, the trappers had not come on so slowly as one would be apt to imagine.

From the old Zuni village—the deserted town of the cliff-dwellers, that strange race of people who built their dwelling-place on almost inaccessible cliffs and who have utterly disappeared leaving no traces behind them to tell who they were, from whence they came, or whither they went—the trappers went directly south, intending to strike a well-watered country, drained by the Little Colorado river on the north and by the Rio St. Francisco on the south, where it was certain that abundant game and pelts could be found.

Long before the water-shed was reached that separated the two rivers young Carson had become a general favorite, and there wasn't one of the party who was sorry that surly, bragging, Big-mouthed John had been swapped off for this lively little lad.

Boy though he was Carson was a most excellent shot, expert with the knife and wonderful in his knowledge of wood and prairie-craft, and besides he was a most excellent cook, no small accomplishment this in the eyes of hungry men who for the present had nothing to do but to march, eat and sleep; and then the lad was so willing and unassuming, always ready

to oblige and never attempting to shirk any of the duties imposed upon him.

He took his turn with the rest and attended to everything so well, that grim Bob McKnight, in speaking of him, remarked: "It's plainly to be seen that pounds and inches don't always make a man."

Since crossing the head-waters of the Flax the party had traveled by day and rested by night, although they had entered the country which the wild Apache warriors claimed as their own, but the Apaches being most essentially "horse Indians," seldom moving except on horseback, and the water-shed being very broken and irregular, not at all suitable for cavalry maneuvers, McKnight knew that there was very little danger of running across the red-skins in that mountainous region.

But as the French proverb very wisely says, "It is the unexpected that always happens!" and one pleasant noon when the party halted in a little grove in the center of a delightful valley some three miles square to take a bite and rest the animals for an hour or two, as was generally McKnight's custom when it could conveniently be done, Carson, whose keen eyes were always on the alert, took advantage of the captain's strolling apart from where the rest were busily engaged in preparing the meal, attending to their arms and to the animals, to approach and ask the favor of a word with him in private.

"Certainly, youngster, what is it?"

The valley was surrounded on every side by hills, well wooded, rising gently in successive elevations, and the keen-eyed boy swept a rapid glance around at the distant hills before he spoke.

McKnight's eyes followed the glance, but he did not discover aught to attract attention.

"I beg your pardon, captain, for presuming to speak, for I know that it ain't right for a boy like I am to think that he is wiser than a man, but it has been on my mind ever since yesterday, and I can't help speaking to you about it, if I die for it, and if it don't amount to anything there's no harm done anyway."

"You have an old head on your shoulders, Carson, and if you keep on as you have begun you'll be mighty apt to make some of us old fellows hang our heads one of these days, so go ahead," McKnight replied, bringing his heavy hand down with a patronizing slip on the shoulder of the boy.

"Ain't we in what is called Apache-land now?"

"Yes, but the reds seldom come up into this neighborhood. If they are on the war-path, going north, they always follow the trail up along the Little Colorado, and if they are heading eastward, by the way of the Rio Pedro they go. In all my experience in this country I never ran across a buck up in this pocket, nor did I ever meet a mountain man who did."

There was a troubled expression on the boy's face and he shook his head slowly.

"Mebbe I'm wrong," he said.

"Do you think you have seen Indian signs?" asked McKnight, anxiously, for if it was so, and the red-skins were in the neighborhood, good-bye to all thoughts of trapping for the present.

"Well, I ain't sure of it, sir, and if you haven't seen any, why I ought not to set my judgment up against yours."

Now the captain of the expedition was one mountain man picked out of a thousand, for there wasn't the least bit of arrogance about him; with all his experience and judgment he was willing to listen and learn from the meanest man in the party.

"No, no, speak out, my boy; if you have seen anything suspicious out with it. This is the Injun country, and though no one that I have known ever met a red devil hyer, that is no reason why we should not run into some of them; a party on a hunting expedition would be mighty apt to stray up into this region, for thar is plenty of game all through hyer."

"Are than any geyser springs in this neighborhood—in any of the hills round us?"

"None that ever I heard of, and this ain't the kind of country for that sort of thing."

"I didn't know yesterday when I noticed the suspicious signs but that it might be the steam from geyser springs rising, but then I had always heard that these Apaches use a smoke signal to give warning and summon their warriors together when their country is invaded."

"They do, and it has been their custom ever since white men knew anything about them, and if you have detected smoke signals it means that some wandering braves have discovered that we are hyer, and they are calling upon their brethren to come to their assistance for the purpose of wiping us out," remarked McKnight, very much disturbed, although one could never have detected it by the expression upon his face.

"See, sir," and the boy called the captain's attention to a high hill, wooded nearly to its top, which rose prominently from amidst the rest of the chain about three miles from the clump of timber which the trappers had selected for a halting-place, in a south-western direction.

And now that McKnight's attention was called to this particular spot, he fancied he could discern a slight, fleecy-like mist curling up from the hill, and after a careful examination he came to the conclusion that the lad was right, it was smoke, and he said as much to young Carson.

"And now see, captain," said the boy, highly gratified that McKnight's matured judgment had confirmed his own impressions, "just look at that other high hill to the south-east of the first one and which I should judge was nearly ten miles from hyer—"

"It is more than that—nearer twenty. I know it; it is where the north fork of the Rio St. Francisco joins the main stream."

"Isn't than an answering smoke curling up from thar too?"

"Sure as yer born!" cried the prairie captain. "Oh, we are in for it! Some of the red devils have discovered us and they are mustering their warriors to go for us."

"Boy, your sharp eyes have saved this hull outfit!" and clasping the lad's hand in his he shook it warmly, while tears of joy fairly stood in the lad's eyes at this warm praise from the lips of the old plainsman.

"Another day's journey and we should have

been tangled up in the canyon country and the red-skins, taking us by surprise would have probably cut us off to a man, but as it is, we are in a pretty snug position hyer, we have got shelter, grass and water"—a little mountain streamlet flowed right through the grove—"plenty of grub and ammunition and if we can't hold our own ag'in' the bucks then we deserve to be wiped out."

"Do you think they will attack us when they find that they cannot surprise us?"

"It's likely that they will; these 'Paches are tarnal ugly cusses, and they have been so long used to crowing over the Mexicans whom they generally manage to whip out of their boots every time they have a tussle with them, that they haven't much opinion of white men anyway; of course it will be their game to jump us with a surprise if they can, for a red skin never goes into a fight without all the odds on his side if he kin possibly fix it that way, but in such a case as this rather than let us pull out, they will go for us in a good, fair open fight if they can't do any better. It will be a sure thing though that the odds in their favor will be three or four to one. We'll have from fifty to a hundred of the red bucks at us."

Great was the astonishment among the trappers when McKnight related to them the discovery which the lad had made, and though some few of them were disposed to laugh at the idea, and set it aside as ridiculous, yet when a careful examination was bestowed upon the smoke-wreaths, curling up so faintly upon the air, there wasn't one in the party who didn't agree that it was "Injun sign," sure enough.

And then the trappers prepared for the bloody time which all felt sure would soon come.

Arms were examined, bullets run, the brush in the grove chopped away and all needful preparations made.

"Now let them come!" cried the captain, as the sun sunk behind the western hills. "The moon stands our friend and if we don't give 'em all the fight they want, my name is Bob McKnight!"

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### A NOTED APACHE.

Now, although there wasn't an Indian in sight when the sun went down and darkness came, yet, to use the common expression, McKnight was sure "the woods were full of them."

That it was Apache smoke signals that Carson had detected on the previous day the captain felt certain, and by this curious system of telegraphy, used to better advantage by the Apaches than by any other tribe, it was possible within a very few hours to notify all the warriors within a hundred miles that a foe had entered the Indian territory and that assistance to expel the invaders was desired.

And so, although not a sign that could be read even by these men so learned in prairie craft, denoted that a red-skin lurked near, watchful eyes had been upon the trappers ever since the noon halt.

As McKnight had guessed, a small party of Indian hunters in quest of game, had detected

the presence of the intruding white men and instantly the smoke signals had been given to summon the warriors.

Two of the Indians—there were three in all—had given the signals, while the third one had kept a careful watch upon the whites, and so cunningly had he managed it, that not a movement of the trappers within the grove had escaped him, and yet none of the prairie men had the slightest suspicion that a red-skin spy was near at hand.

But when the watcher noted the preparations made by the whites for defensive operations, he understood immediately that an Indian attack was anticipated, and so when the war-party arrived, which event took place about nine o'clock, when the moon was high above the horizon and all nature illuminated by her rays as light as by day, the wily red-skins perceived that there wasn't the slightest chance of surprising the whites, who had their pickets posted on the outskirts of the grove in regular army fashion.

The red warriors held a council to decide as to the best way to exterminate the bold invaders who had dared to intrude upon the domains held by the red-men, and sacred to them according to their ideas.

It is the Indian policy never to lose a man in an attack if it can be avoided, and although nearly a hundred braves had been assembled, and there being only some twenty whites, an attack in force—a bold storming of the position chosen by the trappers, seemed certain to result in the death of every man within the grove, yet the Indians, who had learned by experience that the new men in buckskin who had commenced to straggle into their country were far better fighters than the Mexicans, their old-time foes, were reluctant to adopt this bold step, for they felt sure that the attempt would cost them the life of many a stout warrior, and there was just a possible chance that the trappers, owing to the strength of the position which they had chosen, might be able to repulse an attack.

So the Indians came to the conclusion that the attack had better be postponed until the intruders could be got at in some more favorable location.

The night passed away and the morning came without the Apaches manifesting in any way their presence in the neighborhood, and so careful were they to keep themselves concealed from view, that the trappers, on the alert and eager to catch sight of the feather-garnished foe, were not gratified with as much as a view of a single feather, but the whites were not thrown off their guard by this circumstance, nor did they relax in their vigilance in one single iota.

After midday the Indians, perceiving that the trappers apparently did not have the slightest intention of moving from their secure quarters, but on the contrary, were making preparations as though they intended to stay there for a month, began to get impatient, and after holding another council, came to the conclusion to resort to their favorite device of trickery.

So about three in the afternoon, a single warrior made his appearance in the valley, riding his mustang up from the southward, and

coming along in the most peaceful and innocent manner possible.

And when he discovered that there were white men in the little grove in the center of the valley, he pulled his mustang up short, and pretended to be greatly astonished.

Then he wheeled around as though about to seek safety in flight, but after looking over his shoulder and perceiving that the intruders manifested no intention of pursuing him, he made out as if curiosity had got the better of his fear, turned his pony around again and rode slowly toward the grove, displaying his open palms as a sign that he came in peace.

"It is Mangas Colorado," said Bob McKnight, who was pretty well acquainted with the Apaches. "He's only a young chief, but he's one of the best men in the tribe, a blood-thirsty scoundrel though if ever there was one, and as crafty and cunning as he is bold and brutal."

The trapper's opinion of the young warrior was correct to a letter, and for his rare craftiness, as well as because he was able to speak English tolerably plain, was the warrior chosen by his brothers to be their messenger to the whites.

McKnight stepped outside the timber to meet the chief, while the rest of the trappers clustered upon the edge of the grove, the four sentinels excepted, who kept their posts, for, to guard against a surprise, the watch was kept up by day as well as night.

As the savage approached his sharp eyes noticed this fact, and, despite his attempts to appear unconcerned, a slight scowl came over his face.

"How?" he said, as he rode up.

"How?" responded McKnight.

"My white brothers are a long way from home; what do they want in Apache-land?"

"Game; we only want a few furs, and then we will go."

"The game belongs to the red-men: my white brothers must go to their own land, or else the Apaches will come and take their scalps."

"Try it on," responded the trapper leader, slapping the butt of his rifle significantly.

"How long stay here?"

"Till you and yer red devils git out of this neighborhood," McKnight said, bluntly.

"What does my brother mean? Mangas Colorado is alone."

"Yes, now, but I reckon a single whoop from you would raise a big war-party from the timber yonder."

The eyes of the chief glittered, but he restrained his anger, covering it by a contemptuous snort.

"My brother talks like a child; if the red-men were here they would take the scalps of the white men before the sun sets."

"Now, boys," said the trapper, quietly.

On the approach of the Indian he had arranged a scheme to make him a prisoner, feeling sure that the overt act would make the Apaches so angry that they would be sure to reveal themselves if they were in the neighborhood.

A dozen rifles instantly covered the brawny chief, and, as he glared around him in impotent

rage, the trappers advanced and surrounded him.

As McKnight had anticipated, no sooner did the concealed Indians behold their envoy made prisoner than, with fierce yells, they sprung from their coverts, brandishing their weapons, then leaped upon their horses and came swooping down upon the grove.

The whites took to the shelter of the timber, dismounting the prisoner and bearing him with them, binding his arms with a stout lariat, despite his struggles and curses, for the chief could swear as fluently as any white man that ever trod the earth.

On came the Apaches in their wild and headlong charge, completely surrounding the little motte of timber on all sides.

Infuriated by the capture of their comrade, and confident in their strength, they had thrown caution to the winds, and were determined to bear the white-skins down by the bare weight of numbers.

But this time they had to deal with twenty as good fighting men as ever broke bread or supped water in the western land.

The whole idea of the savage attack was to draw the fire of the whites by a headlong charge, then burst into the grove, and in a hand-to-hand fight the trappers would surely be obliged to knock under.

But it was not the first time that the white men had faced Indians in battle array, and Bob McKnight knew a trick worth two of the Indian device.

Instead of reserving their fire until the redskins got well within range, and then giving it to them in a volley, the irregular, yet deadly fire of the skirmish line was adopted.

Each man was instructed when he got a sure bead on a red-skin to knock him over without regard to what his neighbor did, and then to reload with all possible speed, and it was really amusing to see these rough, bearded men gravely chewing mouthfuls of bullets, all ready to spit one down on top of the powder when reloading, and so save some time, and the quickness with which the prairie chieftains reloaded was really wonderful.

Under this system it was impossible to "draw" the fire of the defenders of the prairie island so as to leave them defenseless.

The Apaches came on with reckless boldness, yelling at the top of their lungs, but when the crack, crack, of the sharp-voiced rifles began to ring out on the air, and the shrill war-cries were changed into dull notes of despair and death, as warrior after warrior was tumbled from the saddle by the unerring balls of the trappers, the fury of the charge began to slacken, and by the time the attacking line came within pistol-shot, and in addition to their rifles the whites commenced to use their pistols, the reds had got enough.

With howls of rage at being thus baffled, they wheeled their horses about and fled, still pursued though until they were out of range by the deadly fire of the victorious whites, now yelling their triumph in vociferous shouts.

## CHAPTER V.

### A LOTTERY.

BLOODY indeed had been the repulse of the Apache warriors and terrible the loss which they had sustained; out of the hundred odd savages forty had fallen in the fight, thirty of them killed outright, and ten so badly wounded as to be disabled for any further participation in the struggle, while the trappers had come off almost scot free. Not a single one of them had been even seriously wounded, but then the Indians in the early days of which we write were not armed as well as at the present time, when they go into battle equipped with breech-loading rifles and revolvers of the latest patterns.

Only a few of the Indians engaged in this skirmish had fire-arms at all, and then the most of the guns were the heavy, clumsy Mexican weapons, the trophies of many a frontier raid along the Mexican line, guns which were not to be compared to the long rifles of the trappers.

But the most angry and disgusted man of all was Mangas Colorado, whom the fortunes of war had given into the hands of the pale-faces.

When the tide of attack had come swelling onward with such vigor, his heart had beat high with hope, for he did not believe it to be possible that the white-skins could succeed in beating back the savage host, and when the Indian line broke under the deadly fire and the savage yells of the attacking warriors changed into howls of dismay as they wheeled their ponies away and fled at topmost speed from the "wrath to come," the calmness of the savage deserted him and he cursed his red brethren in the most fluent manner.

Mr. Knight laughed grimly at the outburst.

"Curse away, chief, but I reckon that it will take more than words, good or bad, to make them cattle come up to the rack again after the way we have salted them!" cried the prairie captain.

The Apache ground his teeth in rage.

"I am a prisoner — had I led the attack, mebbe you not laugh so much," he retorted.

"Oh, I know you; I have heard of you before; you are the coming fighting man of the Apache nation — you are Mangas Colorado," Mr. Knight remarked.

"The white skins fly like frightened dogs when Mangas Colorado takes the war-path against them!" And the chief drew himself up and looked disdainfully upon the men who held him, a helpless prisoner, in their hands.

"By gum! I've a good mind to let you go so that you would have a chance to show how much better you could do!" the captain declared.

And up rose a general yell from the trappers flushed with their easy victory.

"Yes, yes, let the cuss go; we kin flax him too, and not half try!"

"Bosh! you a warrior — a big fighting man!" cried the old grizzled veteran in contempt; "nary time! you are only a blowhard, that is what you are. If you had 'a' bin in this hyer little skirmish you would have bin fust man to turn tail and run when you heard the bullet whistling 'bout yer ears."

## Kit Carson, King of Guides.

"You bet!" cried another one of the trappers. "Why, we have got a boyee hyer that kin flax you out of your hide and taller and not half try, either."

And the speaker, who was standing by Carson's side, patted the boy on the shoulder as he spoke.

The eyes of the savage flashed fire; to be thus taunted by foes whom he really despised, despite the proof of their prowess which he had just received, was more than the chief could bear. His chest swelled and his face was convulsed with rage.

"There is not one of you all that dares to meet me in single fight!" he cried, hoarsely.

The trappers all cried out indignantly at this assumption, but McKnight, who had taken an idea into his head, silenced them with a wave of his hand.

"Is not the chief afraid to meet one of the white men in single fight?"

Flames of fire shot from the savage's eyes at McKnight's question.

"Fear! the chief does not know the meaning of the word!"

"Let this matter be decided by a single fight," McKnight suggested. "You are a prisoner in our hands, and so far all the advantage of the struggle has been with us. Now, what do you think of this proposition? We will draw lots among us white men to decide who shall be our champion, and we will release you, and you shall meet him in a hand-to-hand encounter, on foot or on horseback, just as you please. If you conquer our man, you are free to rejoin your comrades; but if you are beaten, then the Apaches are to draw off their warriors and give us free passage to go where we list. What say you, boys—how does that suit?"

The whites agreed without a dissenting voice that it was just about the thing, and each man eagerly protested his desire to be the lucky one who would meet stout Mangas Colorado in single fight.

After considerable difficulty communication was opened with the Apaches, and the captive warrior made known to his brothers the liberal offer of the white captain.

The Indians held a long pow-wow, and finally said they would agree to the conditions, and then preparations for the fight were at once in order.

It was arranged that the combatants were to fight on foot, armed with pistols and knives. The Apache chief was one of the best armed warriors of the tribe, possessing a splendid pair of brass-mounted pistols, evidently spoils secured from some plundered Mexican hacienda, and a long double-edged hunting-knife as keen as a razor.

Then came the important event of the selection of the champion to represent the trappers.

There wasn't a man in the outfit who didn't volunteer, but McKnight said the fairest way to settle the matter would be to leave to chance the decision of the question, and then no one could complain that any partiality had been shown. Let every man anxious to encounter the Indian draw lots—the old way of drawing straws of different lengths was as good as any, and the man who drew the short straw was to encounter the red-skin.

But as there wasn't any straws around, short bits of twigs instead were used.

McKnight cut the twigs, making them all the same length, with the exception of one, which he cut an inch shorter than the others. One twig for each member of the party, even including young Carson, who had been neglected by McKnight in calling the roll to ascertain how many twigs were wanting.

But this neglect the boy had objected to, for, as he justly observed, all agreed that he had done a man's work since he joined the expedition, more than making good the place of Big-mouthed John Walters, and it was only fair that he should have a chance in the lottery with the rest.

The Apache had glared in contempt at the boy when, in his modest way, he had claimed the honor of a chance to become the champion, and the open contempt of the chief was probably the main reason why the majority of the trappers sided with the lad and declared that they thought his claim to be perfectly just and that he certainly ought to have a chance to lay out the savage, which they furthermore declared there wasn't much doubt he could easily do. This was put in to annoy the Indian.

McKnight seeing that the opinion of the party was so strongly in favor of the boy at last consented but put in a condition that the lad should be the last one to draw, thinking in this way to make his chance of drawing the short twig very hard.

The lottery commenced; man after man came up and drew a twig from the captain's hand, until at last there were only two twigs left and two persons to draw them, McKnight himself and the boy trapper. The short twig had not been chosen and it was plain either McKnight or young Carson must get it.

There was a frown on McKnight's face as he made his selection; he was terribly afraid that he would choose the long twig, and so he did.

It was Carson's luck to meet the Indian in single fight.

Mangas Colorado laughed outright when he saw that the champion he was to encounter was only the puny boy, for what chance would such an antagonist have against him.

But Carson's face wore a smile and he glanced at the painted Indian so hideous in his rude adornments with a gleam in his clear, keen eyes that plainly showed he was eager for the fray.

"See hyer, boys, this ain't the fair shake at all!" McKnight cried, now thoroughly angry with himself for having consented to the boy being allowed to take a chance in this death lottery, "and Carson you must let some man take your place."

"No, no!" protested the savage, who thought he had an easy thing of it and did not intend to relinquish the advantage gained, "this child is your warrior according to agreement. When he loses his scalp it will teach you to be wiser next time."

"You mud-colored heathen!" roared the old trapper shaking his clinched fist at the chief; "ef you had ever s'arched the Scriptures, mebbe you wouldn't hav run across a yarn 'bout David and Goliah, how the leetle cuss went out to fite the giant and slew him, 'spite of his we'pons and

his armor, with a leetle bit of a sturn! Let the boy tackle him, Cap," he continued, turning to McKnight. "The Lord will be on his side and he'll down him surer than shooting!"

Finding that this was the general opinion, for the trappers remembered the pluck and skill that the boy had displayed when he first joined the train, McKnight gave way.

"All right, go it!" he said.

The preparations for the encounter were soon made. The savage was released from his bonds and his weapons returned to him.

Then he and Carson were placed about a hundred paces apart in readiness for the signal.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE FIGHT.

THE trappers clustered together on the outskirts of the grove while the Indians came from their shelter in the timber on the edge of the valley, all eager to behold the fight, although in the opinion of the red-skins the white men were crazy to put a mere lad against such a bold young warrior as Mangas Colorado, already reputed to be equal to any brave in the tribe in feats of arms.

And the brave himself was fully of this opinion, and he complacently chuckled as he faced the boy, drew his long pistols from his belt and proceeded to cock them.

Mangas Colorado was really a remarkable warrior, probably as good a one as the Apache tribe ever boasted, and with his long pistols, which he prized as the apple of his eye, it was said he never missed his mark at a reasonable distance.

"Are ye ready? Go it, ye cripples!" cried McKnight.

At the word, promptly, the two champions were in motion. Wonderful contrast! young Carson with his slender form, yet which was tough as finest steel, and the brawny Apache chief.

Although the Indian had drawn both his pistols, Carson only prepared one, but his pistol had two barrels though, so the two were on an equality.

With steady tread each advanced toward the other.

If an ordinary foeman, whom he feared, had faced him, the Indian would not have allowed a single chance to escape, and most surely would have fired the instant he came within range, and long practice had taught him so that he could judge almost to a foot how far his weapons would truly carry, and in this respect he had a most decided advantage over Carson for his pistols were far superior, carrying a ball twenty to thirty feet further than the more common weapons of the lad. But on this occasion the chief reserved his fire, determined to make sure of killing the boy the first shot, and when the time arrived when he felt sure of dropping the white-skin, he halted and raised his weapon to take deliberate aim.

This was Carson's opportunity and quickly he improved it. His pistol came up like a flash and he fired, apparently without taking the trouble to aim, just a second before the Indian.

The quickness of the act saved the life of the boy for the Apache had him "covered" and

more surely the bullet would have struck him in a vital part, had not the savage's aim been disturbed by Carson's bullet striking him just as he pulled the trigger, so that his hand was involuntarily thrown up and the ball whistled harmlessly over the boy's head.

But Mangas Colorado was badly hit; the bullet had entered just under the shoulder, making a very ugly wound.

Tightly together the chief set his teeth, for he was in great pain and he was fearfully enraged too, that the boy foe, whom he despised, had got such a decided advantage over him, and he thrust the discharged pistol into his belt and took the other one from his left hand.

Both had come to a halt. With deliberate care despite the pain under which he was laboring, the Indian again took deliberate aim with the other pistol, and again Carson pursued the same tactics as before and fired just a moment in advance of the other, but the two shots were so near together that one seemed to be the echo of the other.

The fortunes of war were decidedly against the red-skin that day, for his aim was rendered unsteady by the pain under which he was laboring and the bullet did not go within a foot of the boy, but his on the contrary tore along the outstretched arm of the chief.

The pistol dropped from the hand of Mangas Colorado as though it had suddenly become red hot, and despite his savage sternness a groan of mingled anger and pain combined escaped from his lips.

As far as shooting was concerned, for the present he was done for; his strong right arm was useless, and he was beginning to feel weak from the loss of blood, escaping from his wounds.

One chance alone remained: a single desperate effort might turn the tide of war now running so strongly against him, so with wonderful energy, considering the enfeebling effects of his two severe wounds, he plucked the long hunting-knife from his belt with his left hand and rushed toward the boy.

Carson had two shots left in his other pistol, but he disdained to use them; instead he drew his heavy knife and manfully awaited the attack.

The chief faced the lad, towering above him like a giant.

There was a moment's hesitation, and then the savage made a powerful lunge straight for the heart of the boy; but, never having been accustomed to using the knife in the left hand, the Indian was extremely awkward, although he was accounted one of the most expert knife-fighters in the tribe, and therefore Carson had no difficulty in parrying the blow; and then, before Mangas Colorado could recover himself and stand upon the defensive, with a single thrust of the knife the lad gave the chief a most terrible wound.

The Indian, in fearful agony, stumbled backward, and with one last powerful effort he attempted to cast himself upon the nimble, skillful lad, who had indeed played the *role of David* to his *Goliath*, and by sheer force crush him to the ground; but Carson was on the alert, and easily avoided the onslaught by springing

to one side, and as the Apache, bull-like, rushed by him, carried onward by the force of the attempt, with a good straight thrust the keen knife laid open the side of the warrior.

With a hollow groan Mangas Colorado fell forward upon his face, and then relapsed into insensibility.

Young Carson had thus easily conquered the best fighting man in the Apache tribe.

A shout of triumph went up from the throats of the trappers as they beheld the downfall of the Indian, while from his red brothers came a howl of dismay, and straightway they came to the conclusion the boy must be possessed of "big medicine," or else he would never have been able to accomplish such a feat, and from that time forth, down to the very close of his long life, the Apaches looked upon Kit Carson as being something more than mortal.

Mangas Colorado, by the way, did not suffer materially for this encounter, badly wounded as he had been, but lived to be a thorn in the side of the whites for many years, until at last he was killed while a captive at one of the frontier posts by a bayonet stab, administered by a soldier who fancied he was endeavoring to escape.

For once in their lives the Indians kept faith and drew off their forces, permitting the trappers to depart without molestation.

The expedition then went on its way to the hunting ground with which McKnight was so well acquainted.

For a month or so the trappers did very well, following the stream up northward toward its junction with the main river, then game began to get scarce, and McKnight resolved to try some of the small streams coming in from the north.

This took the expedition into the Navajo country, but the trappers had succeeded so well in beating off the Apaches, that they had little fear of the red-skins.

Carson all this while had been winning golden opinions from his associates, for he displayed wonderful skill in both hunting and trapping, and, as the old heads in the party had remarked, he was a natural born prairie-man.

Of course by this time the rest were well aware of the simple incidents of his boyish life. How he had been brought to Missouri, then called Upper Louisiana, when a baby, had assisted his father in the care of his farm, and, when he had been old enough to learn a trade, sent to a harness-maker.

But all the boy's instincts were for the wild life of the frontier, and as soon as he was able he had thrown aside the trade so distasteful to him and set out to become a trapper and prairie guide.

And among his companions there was a firm belief that if the boy lived to be thirty or forty years old, and kept on in the way in which he had begun, he would take high rank mid the renowned captains of prairie and of mountain fame.

That these veterans were true prophets the pages of history now fully prove, for Kit Carson's name leads all the rest.

After getting into the Navajo country the trappers grew rather careless, not encountering any Indian sign, and the result was that

one pleasant afternoon the trappers, making a "bee-line" across the country from one stream to another, ran right into a large Navajo war-party, and the surprise was so complete that both parties opened fire almost before they knew what they were doing.

A running fight ensued, which was kept up even after darkness set in.

By accident Carson became separated from his companions, and being pursued by a half-a-dozen Indians, struck off to the north.

In time he managed to escape from the redmen, but when morning came he was unable to find his companions or know anything in regard to their fate.

Alone in the wilderness he concluded that the best thing he could do would be to strike out for Santa Fe.

It was a terrible journey, and almost incredible were the hardships the boy underwent, but his pluck kept him up, and at last he arrived at the old city.

## CHAPTER VII.

### IN SANTA FE AGAIN.

ALMOST absolutely penniless our young hero arrived at Santa Fe.

It was after nightfall when he entered the town, and as it happened to be the anniversary of the birth of some patron saint dear to the heart of the Mexicans, the inhabitants had given themselves up to mirth and jollity.

A feast-day in the Mexican-land is a wonderful thing, for although as a nation the Mexicans are renowned for sloth and idleness, yet in the pursuit of pleasure they betray an industry really remarkable.

The town was fairly in a blaze with almost countless candles and colored lanterns, nearly every house being adorned with a dozen or more, while the inns and drinking-shops displayed a light or a lantern wherever a "coigne of vantage" could be found.

Every room in the town big enough for the operation boasted a fandango in full blast, a gorgeous affair, the music excepted, which was vile, while at almost every other corner a gaming-table, brilliantly illuminated, and surrounded by an eager crowd of worshipers helped to make things lively.

And this was the way in which young Carson found the town when he struck it, without a penny in his pocket, after his long and perilous journey from the wilds of the Indian country.

The streets were full of people, all bent upon enjoyment, seemingly, and many were the curious glances cast at the lad in buckskin, with his fair skin and his honest, gray-blue eyes, by the swarthy Mexicans. He was such a contrast to the usual "man in buckskin," seen in the town, that it was little wonder he excited attention.

The "North Americans," as the Mexicans usually termed the mountain men and the prairie guides, were generally strapping big fellows, with regular arsenals belted to their persons, regular fire-eaters, kings of the town, great in swagger and loud in talk, the "half hoss, half alligator" men, who could out-talk, out-drink and out-fight all the rest of creation.

On the present occasion there were ten or fifteen

teen of this class in the town, and cutting a "mighty big shine too" as one of them expressed it.

Carson kept his eyes well open whenever he encountered any of the Americans, for he hoped to meet with some acquaintance from whom he could procure a loan, for he was both hungry and thirsty, but as ill-fortune would have it, there was not a single man in the town whom he knew, and the bordermen, not impressed with the simple, unassuming youth, rather turned up their noses at him.

"I must make a raise somehow so I can get something to eat," the youth muttered, as he paused in front of one of the saloons and looked in upon the tempting display so captivating to the sight of a hungry man, of eatables and drinkables so lavishly displayed.

"Buckling my belt tighter is played out; I must get something in my stomach or else the hull machine will collapse. There's my we'pons, but I'd hate to part with them, for in this country, among these Greasers, there's no telling when a man will want them."

Carson was well-armed: across his back was slung the long rifle, which no man along the border could handle better than he, boy though he was, a double-edged hunting knife, with a blade strong enough to go through an inch plank, was thrust in the girle of untanned leathers that girted in his supple waist, and the belt also supported two double-barreled pistols, rather uncommon weapons along the edge of civilization at the time of which we write.

Then as the boy gazed wishfully in at the door of the saloon, while his stomach audibly grumbled its discontent at the way in which it had been treated, a bright idea came into his mind.

The only article of jewelry the boy boasted was a massive gold ring carved out of a chunk of solid ore by a miner's jack-knife.

As he clinched his hands in despair at not possessing money enough to go in and indulge in a "square meal," he felt the pressure of the ring.

"Hi, Jim-along-Josey!" the youth cried in joy, as the remembrance of his treasure came suddenly to his mind, "I reckon the ring will get me grub for a day or two, anyway!" and inspired by the idea he marched boldly into the saloon and elbowed his way through the crowd up to the bar.

There was a party of three, guides and trappers, Americans evidently by their dress and conversation, at one end of the counter, busily engaged in a sport common to the saloons along the frontier, known as "cutting for drinks."

It was as simple a game as the wit of man could well devise, and one which the most ignorant novice could play as well as the oldest hand, a game which depended entirely upon luck, and where skill hadn't any show at all.

A pack of cards was the only "tool" required. The cards were shuffled, each man "cut" and displayed his card in turn, and the man who cut the lowest card, paid the score for the rest of the party.

It was a game very much favored by the saloon-keepers, for it was all profit to them and no loss, no matter who won.

Then too it was such a simple game and so

fair to all parties concerned that a man with any grit at all, could hardly refuse to play when fairly challenged.

But on this occasion when our young hero arrived in the neighborhood of the three Americans the game was at a stand-still.

The giant of the party, the "cock of the walk," as he proudly termed himself, and who was no other than the well-known Big foot Wallace, had had such a run of luck that his companions refused to play any longer.

"Why, we might as well give you our bags of dust and tell you to set up the drinks as often as you like and pay for them with our money!" one of the three exclaimed when bantered to play again by Wallace.

"Sartin', for sure!" chimed in the other. "Luck is dead gone on you to-night and I am not going to buck ag'in' a sure thing any time more."

"Oh, gen'lemen, for the love of goodness! see me once more!" cried Wallace who had drank just about liquor enough to be disagreeable.

Big-foot Wallace was a character and when in his sprees was inclined to be ugly, and being a man of powerful build, standing over six feet in his moccasins, and an expert with all kinds of weapons, all those who knew the man always gave him a wide berth when he got upon the war-path.

He was quite a young man at the time of which we write, but already was about as well known as any guide or mountain-man along the whole line of the frontier.

His appellation of "Big-foot" did not come, as most people suppose, from the fact that he had feet of unusual size, but because in a single hand-to-hand fight, he killed the great war-chief of the Big-foot tribe of Indians, a warrior who had taken more scalps than any buck of his years in all the Southern tribes.

As his companions shook their heads in reply to Wallace's banter, his eyes fell upon young Carson, who had just made his way to the bar.

"Hallo, Hop-o'-my-thumb!" he cried, "smash me into pancakes if I don't believe you're the man for my money! Wil' you cut me for the drinks?"

Now our young man had been brought up on the border where it was not thought to be much harm to indulge in a little game of this sort once in awhile, and as he was really famished for food and drink he seized upon the chance to procure one of the two without being obliged to part with his cherished gold ring, so he said quietly:

"I reckon I won't have much luck, but if there ain't any one else to accommodate you, I don't mind taking a hand in, if you are spiling to get skinned."

Big-foot Wallace elevated his eyebrows, and his companions "haw-hawed" at the odd reply, sounding so strangely coming from the lips of a lad.

"Wa-al, du-n me, ef you ain't the cheekiest leetle bantam that I ever run across!" the mountain giant exclaimed. "Do you know who I am?"

"No, sir."

"Big-foot Wallace!" and then the speaker

glared at the boy, expecting to see him startled by the name, then second to none along the border.

But the boy's face was as placid as ever as he replied:

"Oh, yes, I heard tell of you."

The bold borderers were surprised, for they had expected that the youth would have "taken water" instantly upon learning who it was that had tackled him.

"Oh, you hev?" Big-foot growled; "and who may you be? w'ot's yer handle, my leetle jack-a-dandy?"

"Kit Carson is my name."

"Oh, it is? I say, boys, this is the cock-sparrow w'ot'sawed a feller's leg off on the train only awhile back; I hearn'd on it up to Albuquerque t'other day; but you're my mutton, any way! Drinks for the party now, and you kin cut first."

Without a word and like an old stager Carson cut the cards.

### CHAPTER VIII.

#### A DUEL AT CARDS.

A THREE spot of hearts the boy displayed, and the two borderers, who had suffered so severely at the hands of Big-foot Wallace, nodded their heads as much as to say, "I told you so!"

"No go, young Carson, you're stuck, and you might as well stump up the dust!" Wallace exclaimed, with a coarse laugh of triumph.

"My father used to say that no game was lost until it was won," the lad replied.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the giant. "Why you leetle mushroom, you don't mean to say that you think thar is any chance in the world for you to skin me on a three-spot?"

"We can tell that better after you cut the cards."

"If it was a Jack or a Queen now, you might talk."

"It isn't the lowest card in the pack."

"Nary time, but I want you to know, leetle Johnny Jump-up, that I ain't the kind of a man that cuts low cards. You jest ask these gen'lemen if I ain't skinned 'em clean out of their hide and taller."

"That is no sign that you will skin me."

"I'll bet you a thousand dollars to ten that I kin beat the three-spot and not half try!" roared Wallace, angry at not being able to bluff the boy down.

"I haven't any ten dollars to bet."

"Like as not you ain't got ten cents," growled the other, "but if you can't pay for the drinks, I'll warn your ears till you think your head is a bee-hive!"

"Wait until you win before you trouble yourself about my paying."

"I'll go you a square meal for the hull gang I fax you! and I won't half try!"

"That's a bargain, so go ahead and cut!"

"Why, sonny, it is a million o' chances ag'in one that I beat you."

"The one chance is enough for me to win on."

"A million ag'in one," repeated Wallace as he cut the cards and displayed:

"The two of spades."

Quite a little crowd had gathered around the

party, attracted by the boastful tones of the giant, and when he displayed the losing card a dozen ejaculations burst upon the air.

Wallace for a moment gazed upon the ill-omened card, his brows contracted in sullen rage and then with an oath he dashed the pack down upon the counter.

"Set up your fire-water and yer square meal!" he cried, and then tossed a gold piece upon the bar; "take it out of that, and never mind the change, and that is the kind of a man that I am!"

Young Carson attacked the eatables with great gusto and after the lunch was dispatched, Wallace, who had been regarding the boy with an evil eye, again addressed him:

"You are a pretty cheeky little cuss, and you will be a man afore yer mother if some red-skin don't lift yer h'ar afore you grow. Nice knife you hev got thar, but it ain't fit for a boy like you; now for a man like I am it would be jes' the tool. Say! I will put up a five-dollar gold piece ag'in the knife and cut you for it."

"You couldn't buy such a knife as this for five dollars," the lad responded, drawing the steel and displaying it. He was reluctant to risk the knife for it was a present from his father and was a superior weapon, richly worth a dozen of those commonly sold.

"Ten dollars ag'in the knife, but I reckon you durst not take the dose, my leetle bantam. You made the trick once but you don't dar' to risk it ag'in!"

The temptation was a great one to the penniless lad, and then too, boy though he was, there was that in Carson's nature which could not brook to be dared by mortal man.

"Come! is it a go?" and Wallace took out the gold piece and rung it down upon the counter.

Ten dollars to such a lad as young Carson was a large sum, and if he was successful in gaining the wager it would keep him for some time, perhaps until he could get a chance with some train.

"Yes, I will go you the knife against ten dollars."

"Take good look at it for at the first flip she'll be mine!" cried the borderer, boastfully, as he shuffled the cards. "Do you want to shuffle 'em arter me?"

"Oh, no, sir, I have every confidence that you will play fairly."

"You kin bet your bottom dollar on that! Any objections to my cutting first this time?"

"None in the least."

Big-foot Wallace cut and then displayed his card in triumph.

"Queen of diamonds! hey! ain't she a beauty! whar are you now, sonny?"

"Eight better cards in the pack and three just as good," responded the lad, not in the least dismayed by either the card nor the vaunt.

"How eight better?"

"Four aces and four kings."

"Aces don't beat queens."

"Ain't aces high?"

"Sometimes they are and sometimes they ain't, but they ain't high in this game."

There was a general expression of dissent from this, for the sympathy of the crowd was most decidedly with the boy.

"Oh, come, Wallace, give the youngster a show for his money!" cried one of the mountain men. "You skinned me on a ace a while ago, and nobody disputed that it was high."

Wallace looked sheepish for he was a pretty good sort of a fellow at heart; although when he was in liquor he was disposed to be overbearing to strangers, especially to those to whom he took a dislike.

"Wa-al, gen'lemen, I sw'ar I don't want to take any advantage of the boyee; I've got a sure enough thing as it is!" he declared.

"Ace is high then?" demanded Carson, who shrewd beyond his years was bound to have this point settled before the game proceeded.

"Ace is high, cock-sparrow!"

"That is all right; all I want is a fair field and no favor."

Then the boy cut and up came the king of spades.

"Wa-al, cuss the luck!" Wallace blurted out as he stared at the card.

"Pardner, I'll have to trouble you for that ten dollars," the lad said, very calmly and in a fever of joy at the good fortune which had befallen him.

"Hol' on!" Big-foot cried. "I ain't satisfied and you must give me a chance to get hunk. I'll put up twenty dollars again' the knife and the ten!"

Now this did not suit Carson at all. Although not very strictly brought up yet his mother had often warned him against the evil effects of drink and gaming; when he was suffering for food and drink he had put the counsel aside, but now that his appetite was satisfied and he had ten dollars in his pocket he would rather not game any more; but when he declined Wallace at once taunted him with being afraid and told him it wasn't the "squat" thing for a cuss to win money and then quit the game."

And so being thus bantered, the lad yielded to the advice of the bystanders who urged him to go on and agreed to cut once more but only once.

"Win or lose, this will be the last time!" he declared.

"Don't you want to bet a leetle more?" Wallace asked. "Kin ye rake up another ten or twenty so as to make the game interesting?"

"No, sir, I haven't any more money," the lad replied.

"Say, I'll put in ten for the boy," said a rough-looking customer in the crowd, pushing his way up to the bar. "Yes, I reckon I'll make it twenty or even fifty if that doesn't over-size your pile," he added, turning to Wallace.

The mountain man glared at the other, who was an American, like himself, fully as stalwart in form, and in fact, almost enough like him in dress and appearance to be his brother.

"Who mought you be, anyway?"

"Bill Williams is my handle."

"What! not Big Bill Williams?" cried the other, in astonishment.

"Yas, that is what I'm called sometimes."

"Glad to see yer; give us yer paw! I'm Big-foot Wallace, I am!"

And then these two prairie kings, who in

after years were to win names that will never die while grass grows and water runs in our western land, shook hands warmly. It was the first meeting of three of the most remarkable youths that ever flourished upon the border, Wallace, Williams and Carson, all now right on the threshold of their careers.

"I'll go you twenty, Bill, 'side the main stake, and if I'm stuck I'll quit satisfied."

"Twenty be it, and if you win, youngster, I'll give you half of my stake," Williams said.

The two looked upon Carson as a child on account of his small stature, although in reality there wasn't five years' difference in their ages.

"Now, then, here's for fun!" Big-foot observed, as he shuffled the cards and then cut them, but his countenance fell as a ten-spot of hearts came up.

"I reckon I'm salted for forty, sure as you're born!" he exclaimed, in disgust.

And he was quite right, for Carson cut a Jack.

"You're a big Injun fer luck!" Wallace cried, "and durn me ef I don't take you for a pard, if you like!"

## CHAPTER IX. THE FANDANGO.

THINGS had changed wonderfully since the lad had entered the town, with not money enough in his pocket to pay for a supper.

Now he was "well heeled," financially speaking, and honored with the friendship of two of the most noted young men on the frontier.

No wonder then that he accepted the offer of Big-foot Wallace in the same frank spirit in which it was given.

"I tell you what it is, younger, seeing as how we have had so much fun together, we'll go in and make a night of it, what do ye say? and Williams, old pard, can't we count you in, too?" Wallace exclaimed.

"I'm all hunkidory for fun," the borderer replied, "and I reckon that ef we three git a-going we'll kinda make things howl in this yer town, to-night. How air you, Carson, on the we'pon question? Kin you handle a knife or pistol as well as you kin cut cards? You look as if you could."

"Well, I guess I can manage to hold my own with the average man, although I ain't anything but a boy," replied Carson, who never bragged in all his life.

"Oh, I'll risk him a-taking care of himself!" Wallace exclaimed. "Ary cuss w'ot kin skin me a-cutting keerds, kin do almost anything, and you kin bet yer bottom dollar on it, too, every time."

"Whar shall we go?"

"Furst-class fandango at the City of Mexico ranch," suggested the bar-keeper, who had been listening to the conversation.

"Yes, yes; and I know the old yaller don w'ot keeps the shebang jest like as if he was my brother," Wallace remarked.

"I reckon I know him, too—Don Fernando, isn't it?"

"That's the man," responded the bar-keeper.

"Ginerally a lot of pretty gals thar, eh?"

Williams asked, pulling down his hunting shirt and assuming a foppish air.

"Oh, the gayest in the town go to the don's when he gives a grand fandango, particularly on a 'feast day' like this hyer one; but I tell you what, rocks, you have got to keep your eyes skinned how you fool 'round these high-toned gals, 'cos they ain't no common heifers, and even if you git along all right with them, you have got to look out for their fathers and their brothers and their lovers, and every one of them furst-class critters has got a heap of them, I reckon."

"Oh, yes, and they air on the fight, too, I s'pose," Wallace remarked.

"Wa-al, to tell the truth, these Mexicans are mighty touchy sometimes, and inclined to be jealous of us Americans," responded the saloon man, who was also from the "States."

"And they are tricky cusses, too," Williams observed; "out with their knives and giv' it to yer in the back when ye ain't looking."

"We must keep our eyes open; that is all that is to it. Wa-al, what do you say—air ye fur the fandango?"

"I am," Williams replied.

"I am," said Carson, only too glad, boy-like, to get a chance to see life.

"Take off yer rifle and leave it hyer with the bar-keeper," Wallace suggested, "for it will be in your way."

This request complied with the three started forth to visit the fandango.

A Mexican fandango is an institution and at the time of which we write was even more so than to-day, even though now one is well worthy of a visit.

The City of Mexico ranch, as the old Mexican known as Don Fernando, called his place which was saloon and ball-room combined was one of the largest buildings in the town, and when the three Americans reached it, was well filled with pleasure-seekers.

An orchestra of three musicians rasped away vigorously at one end of the room, on an elevated platform, near the bar where the liquid refreshments were dispensed, and the floor was well filled with dancers footing it away most merrily.

There were quite a number of strangers in the room, but very few Americans when the three friends entered, and there were some few black looks aimed at the trappers as the three made their way to the bar, where the don presided, in order to have a word with the proprietor.

Now the Mexican was not at all glad to see the new visitors, although, personally, he liked the "North Americans" well enough, for they were good customers and always paid liberally for anything they had.

But he knew the bad feeling that existed in the breasts of a great many of his countrymen toward the strangers—the blue-eyed, light-haired race—although, as a rule, the Mexican women, particularly the younger ones, were disposed to look with a very favorable eye upon them.

The Americans too were not inclined to stand any nonsense, and, generally, if there was trouble, one trapper could handle five or six of the Mexicans, so in the event of a row, there

was sure to be bloody work, and a skirmish on his premises was exactly what the don didn't want. First thiere was the danger of stopping a stray bullet, intended for some other man, and the don hadn't any idea of leaving this pleasant world yet awhile, and then the damage which would surely be done to his furniture and fixings must be considered.

But for all of this feeling he received his visitors, unwelcome though they were, in the courteous manner so common to the Spanish race, even when the throat-cutting of the party is meditated.

"How are ye, don?" quoth Williams, nodding familiarly to the Mexican, "hope I see you well!"

"Oh, yes, I am quite well, most honored sirs, and you are welcome to my miserable mansion; all within its walls are yours, most magnificent seniors. Will you honor your servant by sipping a glass of his wine?"

But at the same time when he placed the wine bottle upon the counter he also pushed a flask of mescal, as the strong fiery Mexican liquor is called, over toward the trapper. By long experience he knew the style of drink preferred by these rude sons of the prairie.

Williams winked at the don as he filled a glass with the fiery fluid, "red pepper and camphene combined," as the Americans generally termed it.

"This hyer is the kind of wine I like, something that will take hold and claw all the way down," he observed.

Wallace followed his example, but Carson and the don tasted the wine.

All through his career Kit Carson was never noted for his drinking qualities, and perhaps it is to the fact of his prudence in this respect as well as to the rare qualifications which he possessed for the adventuring life he chose that he managed to live to such a ripe old age, a great man to the very last while the other plainsmen, companions of his youth, but less careful in their habits, dropped off one by one like over-ripe fruit, old men before their time.

"The senors will join in the dance?" the don inquired.

"Oh, yes, we'll shake a leg if we can get any partners," Wallace replied.

"I will attend to that, but, senors, for the love of Heaven! keep your tempers; it is a feast day, and the good fathers will be much disturbed if there is any fighting."

"We don't come to kick up any disturbance, don," Williams announced. "We air jest as

gentle as sucking pigs, all three of us, and unless our toes are trod on thar won't be the least difficulty; but if any galoot should rub up ag'in' me on purpose, you know, or slap my face, or take my gal away, or say I wasn't any gentleman and couldn't drink, in course I should have to try to salivate him."

"Oh, there will not be any danger of that," exclaimed the Mexican. "But you North Americans are so quick to take offense, it is a word and a blow, and the blow sometimes comes first."

"We are on our good behavior to-night," Wallace hastened to assure him, "and if your folks don't put on any frills and attempt to rub

the hair the wrong way thar won't be the least bit of trouble."

"No danger of that."

The don felt perfectly confident in regard to this, although he had noticed that there were some black looks directed against the Americans, but as the Santa Fe bloods had attempted two or three times to give the strangers a lesson, teach them politeness as they said, and had been terribly thrashed on every occasion, the giver of the fandango did not believe that there would be any of the Mexicans rash enough to pick a quarrel with the strangers without good cause.

Now the three Americans had not the least intention of making any trouble; they had come to the dance with the intention of having a good time, and warfare was the last thing in their thoughts.

The don was as good as his word and introduced the three to some of the prettiest girls in the room.

On account of Carson's size he picked out one of the smallest girls at the fandango for him, but a veritable little beauty, and one about whom all the young bloods of the city were crazy, for she was not only a beauty, but a wit as well, and the niece of the richest man in the town and his heiress, her own parents being dead.

The girl, who had been splendidly educated, far above the rest of her associates, having been brought up at a convent school in the city of Durango, was at first inclined to make fun of her boy partner, as she termed him, for she did not have a very good opinion of the Americans, having only met with rude, rough trappers and the like, but like the shrewd young miss that she was, she soon discovered that the lad, who was just of her own age, was something different from the usual run of prairie men. Carson spoke Spanish fluently, and before a single dance was over, he had completely charmed the girl, and she made up her mind that she would not dance with any one else that evening.

## CHAPTER X.

### A LITTLE DIFFICULTY.

As was only natural under the circumstances, the idea of the young American being allowed by the girl to monopolize her society almost entirely was not at all relished by the Mexican gallants, and there were many angry words muttered in regard to it, and, finally, a cousin of the lady, a ranchero, all decked out in gorgeous apparel, brave in silver bell buttons and gold lace, determined to put a stop to it.

Carson being only a boy, he thought he could easily intimidate him.

"Gracious heavens, senora!" he exclaimed, swaggering up to where the couple sat, getting their breath after an exhausting dance; the position they occupied was in a corner of the room rather remote from the throng, for in the intervals between the dances nearly all the guests clustered around the bar at the other end of the apartment. "Is it possible that you are going to dance with this gringo boy forever? Come, young sir, retire and give your betters a chance!"

The face of the Mexican girl grew anxious.

for this man was noted as the bully of Santa Fe, and was never so happy as when engaged in some quarrel, and when he was compared to the quiet American lad the advantages seemed terribly in his favor.

"Perhaps I had better not dance with you any more," she said in an undertone to the American. "This man is a dangerous fellow, and I think he wants to pick a quarrel with you."

"I am not in the least afraid of him, and if that is all, you need not hesitate to dance with me as much as you please," Carson replied in the same undertone.

"Well, what are you two whispering about?" the bully demanded, determined to pick a quarrel, and so frighten the lad away. "Don't you know that it ain't polite to whisper in company? By the saints, I swear, I have half a mind to take you by the ear, young man, and lead you from the room, so as to teach you how to behave yourself." And he scowled at the lad in the ugliest kind of a way.

But not in the least bit intimidated was Carson, but instead a glint of fire shone in his keen eyes as he looked the Mexican straight in the face.

"You had better not try that on with me, sir, or you my find you have got the wrong pig by the ear," he replied.

"Oh, you boast do you, you gringo dog!" hissed the Mexican, advancing a step as though with intent to carry out his threat.

The girl sprung to her feet in alarm, and Carson perceiving that there was great probability of trouble, which could not well be avoided, also rose, so as to be ready for the fray when the time came.

Although much smaller in build than the Mexican, he had not the slightest fear in regard to the issue of a personal encounter with him, for like all the boys raised on the frontier, he knew how to use both hands and feet, being an excellent boxer and an expert wrestler.

"In the name of the Virgin, senor, I beg you not to quarrel with this gentleman; he is a stranger and means no harm."

"He mustn't dance with you any more, and he must get out, vamose! his room is better than his company!" replied the yellow-faced ruffian, with another ferocious scowl at the boy, for he understood well enough, although the girl did not, that the American was not inclined to submit tamely to his commands.

"I will not dance any more with any one," said the trembling girl, hastily, "I will go home!"

"But not accompanied by this gringo!" cried the Mexican, fiercely.

All the blood in the boy's body was fired at this, and he cried out, with evident tones of anger in both face and voice:

"And who made you this lady's master or mine either for that matter? What business is it of yours, you ugly ruffian? If the lady is willing to dance with me, what is it to you? If she is willing to accept my escort to her home, I shall most certainly go home with her, in spite of you or a thousand like you!"

The boldness of this speech so amazed the Mexican that for a moment he could only stare

in wonder, while the girl seemed to be turned into a statue with fear and astonishment.

"What?" cried the bully at last, when he recovered from the stupor into which he had been thrown, "do you dare to defy me? Why, you pipe-stem, I have a mind to break you in two!"

"If you try it on you may not find that job so easy as you seemed to anticipate," the American replied, not flinching in the least.

"Caramba! I'll wring your ears from your head and feed them to my dogs!"

The Mexican advanced with both arms outstretched. A fairer opportunity could not have been afforded and Carson was quick to take advantage of it.

Although small the lad was all bone and muscle, and as tough and strong as a pine knot.

Drawing himself well together, he planted two temple blows right in the bloated face of the Mexican, first the right fist and then the left, blacking both the bully's eyes, and causing the blood to start freely.

Back reeled the Mexican, forced by the violent strokes, uttering a howl of pain that instantly attracted the attention of every one within the room, and a single glance only was needed to inform them all in regard to what had happened.

The Mexican, astounded by the treatment which he had received and which was entirely unexpected, for he had never before understood how skillful the Anglo-Saxon race are in the "noble art of self-defense," for a moment stood and stared at the lad, and then suddenly realizing that it would never do to tamely submit to defeat at the hands of such a boy, with a cry of rage he rushed at him, intending to seize him in his strong arms and crush the very life out of him.

Like a rock Carson faced him; it was the old-time struggle over again, pluck and science against savage rage and brute force.

With a couple more of terrible blows, delivered straight as a die, full in the face, and each crack drawing the claret and puffing out the swollen face of the Mexican in a terrible manner, Carson checked the bull-like rush of his antagonist and brought him to a dead halt.

It would have taken a man possessing far more nerve than dwelt in the bully to have persevered in the attack when received so warmly, for the Mexican was really like a child in the hands of the lad, and had no more idea of guarding against, or avoiding the sledge-hammer like blows than he had of flying.

A yell went up from the Mexicans when they beheld the unceremonious way in which their comrade was being handled, but the two trappers, Big-foot Wallace and Bill Williams, came instantly to the front with their hands on their weapons, determined to see fair play and exceedingly rejoiced at the ability displayed by their "little pard," as they termed young Carson.

Some of the Mexicans had drawn their knives and were evidently about to rush forward to the assistance of their countryman but the prompt movement of the trappers caused them to hesitate.

"None of that—none of that, ef you please!" Big-foot Wallace yelled, and he drew his pistols

with a flourish to give weight to his warning, which the hasty Mexicans were quick to heed notwithstanding their rage, for all of them had some experience of how a North American could fight when his blood was up.

"Fair play is a jewel, you bet!" cried Williams, emphatically, "and man to man is what anybody ought to be satisfied with!"

"Oh, gentlemen, for Heaven's sake! let us have no disturbance!" implored the old don, fearing that a regular free-fight was going to be inaugurated and trembling for the safety of his establishment.

But as far as the Mexican was concerned he had all he wanted of fisticuffs, and although he thirsted for revenge he was not eager to face the terrible maulers of the lad again.

Although his face was cut and bleeding, and the wounds smarted in a very painful manner, yet he was not materially damaged, and was eager to wipe out the defeat which he had suffered.

"Caramba! I am no fist-fighter!" he exclaimed, wiping the blood from his face with an extremely dirty handkerchief, "I am a man and fight with weapons like a man and I demand satisfaction!"

"Durn me ef you ain't the hardest cuss to satisfy that I ever run across!" Wallace cried, before Carson could open his mouth to reply. "Hyer you hev been pounded until your face looks like a piece of raw beefsteak and yet you are anxious for more. You're by long odds the biggest hog that I hev seen for many a long day."

"I am ready to give the gentleman all the satisfaction he wishes," Carson remarked, playing the part of a man remarkably well for a boy of his years.

"Outside, gentlemen, outside," shrieked the don. "Outside, gentlemen, for the love of all the saints! This is no place to fight—here we dance and we drink, but no fighting is allowed."

"Shet up yer youp!" Williams retorted. "Durn yer old shebang, do you think we want to clean the hull place out, that you make so much fuss about it?"

"Come outside!" cried the ranchero, drawing one of his long, heavy Spanish pistols—he wore three in the scarf that encircled his waist, also two ugly-looking knives. "Come outside, and I will put you where the dogs won't get at you."

"Go ahead, senor, I'm your man!" Carson replied, promptly.

"And we want fair play at this hyer leetle picnic, you understand, or else we'll take a hand in, you bet!" Wallace cried.

And then they all marched out into the street to fight by the light of the moon.

## CHAPTER XI. THE ENCOUNTER.

The Mexican had been the first to leave the house, and he walked up the center of the street for about a couple of hundred feet, carefully examining the charges of his pistols as he went, although, as he was counted on as being a dead shot, he had little doubt in regard to the result.

The American lad was a marvelous boxer, but still he was rather inclined to believe that this

was a natural gift common to all the Anglo-Saxon race, for he had never encountered one yet who didn't possess it, but as far as the use of a pistol went he might be the merest tyro; it was more than probable, of course, that he could shoot a little, but quite out of the question for him to be any such marksman as he was.

The throng that came from the fandango hall clustered close to the house; there wasn't any of them anxious to stop a bullet, and in these street fights the missiles took unaccountable flights sometimes, and in fact on the border it is a common saying in affairs of this kind, that the safest place for a spectator is behind or by the side of one of the shooters.

The two trappers had drank just about enough of the fiery "mescal" whisky of the Mexicans to get their blood up to fighting heat, and when the two principals had got into position ready for the fight, Williams nudged Wallace and said:

"Hey, Big-foot, it seems to me kinder lonesome for our leetle pard to hev this hyer shindig all to himself. Hadn't we better take a hand in, jest to keep the pot a-boiling, you know?"

This proposition suited Wallace's humor at the moment, exactly.

"By hokey, you're right, pard—right every time! They must give us a show for our money, or we'll know the reason why. I feel jest like chawing up a dozen of these Greasers. Go fur 'em, Bill!"

"Say, senors, let's make a three-handed game of it!" Williams exclaimed. "Me and my pardner, hyer, are jest a-dying for a chance to chip in. We ain't had a bit of fun for a month of Sundays, and now, jest for greens, if any two of you Mexicans will step out into the road, me and my pardner will do our best to salivate you, so help us Bob!"

But not one of the bystanders felt at all inclined to respond to the offer.

They thought it was bad enough for the ranchero to encounter the boy, for they had a wholesome fear of the prowess of the strangers, but to stand up in opposition to these desperate men in buckskin required more courage than any man in the crowd could muster just at that time.

The trappers looked around them in contempt when they saw that there wasn't any response to the bold challenge.

"Oh, well, if thar ain't ary man in the gang peeled fur fun, that settles it," Wallace exclaimed in disgust.

"If we can't fight we can look on, but we had a heap sight rather fight," Williams added.

But as all the Mexicans were of a contrary opinion, the trappers had no opportunity for "fun," as they termed it.

"Caramba! dog of an American! are you ready?" the Mexican cried, fiercely, burning with an intense desire to shed the blood of the bold youth who had so easily conquered him in the saloon.

"Ready," responded Carson, who had followed the example of his foe and stood with a cocked pistol in each hand.

"Come on, then, and some of you go dig his grave; in ten minutes I will see that he is

ready for it!" cried the bully in vaunting accents.

"If he downs the leetle cuss, I'll have his scalp afore he is an hour older!" Big-foot Wallace whispered in Williams's ear, and that worthy replied with a sententious:

"You bet!"

Carson astonished the challenger by taking him directly at his words, advancing upon him with rapid footsteps.

As well as any gunsmith living the lad knew the superiority of the Mexican pistols at long range over his English-made weapons, while at a short distance his tools were fully as good, if not better, than the extravagant-sized fire-arms used by the "Greasers."

The rapid advance disconcerted the Mexican, for although a good shot, yet he was one of those marksmen who loved to dwell on his aim, and who was worthless at quick, snap shots.

The boy advanced in an irregular, zig-zag way, so that it was impossible for the other to "cover" him for more than a moment at a time.

Finally, as the lad began to get dangerously near, the Mexican fired, although not at all satisfied in regard to his aim.

Thanks to the tactics adopted by the boy, the bullet which was intended for his heart glanced across the top of his right shoulder, inflicting only a slight flesh wound.

With an oath the bully changed pistols from hand to hand, so as to bring the loaded pistol into action.

Carson was quick to improve the opportunity.

Up like a flash came his right hand, and then the crack of the pistol-report followed. The boy had discharged the weapon so quickly that no one believed that he could have taken aim at all.

But the Mexican knew he did, for with a moan of pain he threw up his hands, staggered back a few paces, and then fell to the earth all in a heap.

"Plugged him, by blazes!" Big Bill Wallace exclaimed, really astonished at the skill displayed by the boy-adventurer. "Furst crack, too, by hokey!" Wallace added.

Some of the Mexicans ran to assist the fallen man.

"He's dead—he's dead!" muttered the bystanders, but Carson, catching the exclamation, at once contradicted it.

"No; he's not dead," the boy asserted.

And when the good Samaritans bent over the fallen bully they perceived that he still breathed, although insensible.

"There isn't any blood—no mark of a wound," cried one of the Mexicans, examining the person of the prostrate man.

"Oh, no," responded Carson, "he's not in any danger, and in an hour or two will be as well as ever, although I reckon he will be a little more cautious about his movements in future. If you will take off his hat you will find the mark on his skull made by the track of my bullet. I just 'creased' him, that's all."

With profound wonder the bystanders looked upon the lad after he had volunteered this statement.

The operation of "creasing" is well understood by all the plainsmen, and is frequently used in the capture of wild horses.

The trick consists of firing a bullet so near the head as to just crease the bone, producing temporary insensibility but not otherwise injuring the animal.

"Carson, who had no wish to injure the Mexican in any way, merely wanted to give him a lesson, and so by putting in practice this old device had won a bloodless victory.

"Wa-al, you kin chew me inter bull-beef ef that ain't a leetle ahead of all the shooting that I have heered tell uv fur a dog's age!" Big-foot Wallace declared.

"Durn me fur a mule-headed son of a perarie snake ef this hyer boy ain't a hummer!" Williams remarked.

"Of course! do you s'pose he could hev skinned me the way he did ef he hadn't been—skinned me as I war never skun afore since I was hatched?" the other trapper replied.

By this time the Alcalde of the town had appeared on the scene attracted by the report that a riot was in progress at the don's fandango; he was accompanied by his officers but upon learning the truth in regard to the matter, he contented himself by ordering the senseless man to be removed to a neighboring dwelling and dispatched a messenger for a doctor.

The Alcalde was a man well in years, crafty and unscrupulous and reported to be almost insane in his hatred for the Americans whom he regarded as intruders and whom he never hesitated to punish to the very extent of his power if any of them were ever brought before the tribunal of justice over which he presided.

And on this occasion, noticing the black looks which he cast upon the strangers when he learned what had taken place, the bystanders expected that he would attempt to make trouble.

The trappers too, who were not ignorant of the Alcalde's character, had an idea of this sort also and their hands were on their weapons ready for resistance if the official chose to let slip the dogs of war.

But whether the magistrate, after learning the particulars of the affray came to the conclusion that the fallen man richly deserved all that he got, having been the aggressor all the way through, or whether he was awed by the determined looks of the Americans and realized that if he attempted to take them into custody a fight would surely ensue in which much blood would be shed, certain it is, that after seeing the injured man safely removed, he, together with his officers withdrew without taking the trouble to address a word to the strangers.

The little affair being concluded all returned again to the saloon and the fandango was resumed with renewed vigor, but there wasn't any one now who tried to interfere with the Americans and their partaers. The trappers were the lions of the night.

## CHAPTER XII.

### A SURPRISE.

THE fandango lasted until about one in the morning and then, after a parting "nightcap" all around, the guests departed.

Carson went with the trappers, for as Wallace declared "they were all pards now!"

On the way to their hotel, as the two-storyed shanty, rudely constructed out of rough boards, was called, the trappers poked considerable fun at their young companion on account of the conquest which they declared he had made of the pretty Mexican girl.

"She's a hummer, I tell yer!" Wallace declared.

"And did ye notice the way she war rigged out, silk and laces and diamonds, the real things too, you kin bet high on it, fur I'm a judge and know 'em when I see 'em! I tell yer, she's a rich heifer and I really reckon, youngster, that you hev struck a mighty rich lead."

"Sure as yer born!" Williams ejaculated. "I wouldn't be surprised if she should turn out to be a general's darter, or something of that sort."

"And these Mexican generalers are mighty rich fellers too, allers. Their wages ain't big but the pickings and stealings air tremendous," Wallace added.

"Who is she anyway—what's her name? Mebbe I know who she belongs to for I'm pretty well acquainted with the dons in this region."

Carson shook his head, and was obliged to confess that he had not learned the girl's name. In fact the boy was not at all of an inquisitive nature, and although he begged the lady to tell him who it was with whom he was having the pleasure of dancing, yet when she laughingly parried the question, and immediately flooded him with inquiries as to who he was, and why he had come to Santa Fe, he had not pursued the subject.

At the ranch the three were all put into one room, the furniture of which was of the most primitive description, and as for the beds they were conspicuous by their absence, three old buffalo robes spread right out upon the bare boards of the floor doing duty instead.

All three were pretty tired, for they had not spared themselves at the fandango, and had done full justice to the music, so, within ten minutes after stretching themselves out upon the skins, they were all fast asleep, and they slept the sound and healthy sleep which falls to the lot of men in rude and rugged good health.

But after they had enjoyed their refreshing slumbers for a couple of hours they were suddenly awakened by rough hands grasping them.

They awoke from sleep to find themselves prisoners in the hands of the Mexicans. The room was filled with armed men and in the center of the apartment stood the Alcalde who bore such a hatred to all Americans.

A triumphant scowl was upon his dark and gloomy face as he looked upon the prisoners.

It did not take the Americans long to understand what had occurred.

The Alcalde had made up his mind to arrest the trappers on account of the wounding of the Mexican bully, but had hesitated to undertake the task, even with the overpowering force at his command, openly and above-board, for he had rightly calculated that the Americans would make a desperate resistance and that

"h blood would be shed: the Alcalde had

learned by long experience, that there was a great possibility, notwithstanding the overwhelming odds against them, that the Americans would be able to fight their way out of the town, so, with the wily cunning so common to his race, the Mexican determined to surprise the trappers in their sleep and secure them without giving them any chance to offer resistance.

The plot had succeeded to a charm. The cohorts of the Alcalde pounced upon the prey in their sleep, seized and bound them with strong lariats without giving them a chance to use a weapon.

The two trappers fairly foamed at the mouth with rage when they discovered their plight. To be thus surprised was disgraceful.

"Yer black-hearted, yaller skinned rattlesnakes!" Big Bill Williams cried, "what in tarnation thunder do yer mean by this hyer outrage?"

"Gol durn yer, yer greasy mutton-heads!" yelled Wallace, almost purple in the face with rage, "yer don't dar' to give us a show for our money. Why, I kin fight a dozen on yer with my bare fists and you kin have all the we'pons you want to, do yer mind?"

"You fight with your tongue well," the official observed sarcastically, "but officers of justice do not do battle with red-handed criminals except in order to secure them so as to make them answerable for their deeds."

"What have we done that you call us criminals?" Carson asked.

"A strange question to come from you, who, though only a boy, has slain one of our best citizens in cold blood."

"It is false," the lad replied, promptly. "I did not kill the man, although I might have done so easily enough if I had so wished, and his blood would have been upon his own head. He provoked the quarrel in which he suffered."

"The law will speedily decide as to your guilt or innocence," the Alcalde answered.

"See hyer, this is a high-handed outrage on our rights as free American citizens!" Wallace cried in a state of great indignation, "and I give you fair warning that if you keep on in this hyer thing, you'll be apt to run ag'in' a snag that will upset yer hull apple-cart."

"You are not in your own country now, señor American; you seem to forget that fact," the Alcalde replied with a malignant smile.

"I reckon you will find that the American nation is big enough to reach over and whip all creation!" Big Bill Williams exclaimed, defiance written in every feature. "Jest you dar' to hurt a hair of our heads, and I wouldn't give the wag of a rabbit's tail for all yer durned old town!"

"Mexico does not fear you barbarians—sons of the Evil One—and now that you are in our power, taken red-handed in your crime, you will be punished as surely as that the sun will rise to-morrow."

"No sure thing 'bout that; s'pose it's cloudy," suggested Williams, the irrepressible.

To this sally the Mexican official did not deign to reply.

Under a strong guard the prisoners were removed to the town jail, a one-storied house, built of 'dobes as the unburned bricks of the

Mexicans are termed, and into a cell, lighted only by a small window high up in the wall, and guarded by iron bars, the prisoners were thrust.

Their weapons were taken away, and heavy chains, the relics of a far-off age, when prisoners were treated like wild beasts, were affixed to the wrists and ankles of the three; then the lariats which bound them were removed, and the Mexicans with many a bitter gibe withdrew, leaving the prisoners in the solitude and darkness of their prison-pen to meditate upon the unexpected reverse which had befallen them.

That little mercy was to be expected at the hands of the Mexicans they understood well enough, for even at the time of which we write, the inhabitants of the province of New Mexico seemed to have a foreboding of the ultimate fate of their country, and looked with eyes of hate upon the fair-skinned Northerners who were destined to become their conquerors.

The only chance for the three was in the fear of the Mexicans. Their captors might hesitate to proceed to extremities, lest the Americans on the frontier, who were all closely allied, and when attacked made common cause, might become exasperated and seek for vengeance.

Both Wallace and the lad were inclined to take a gloomy view of the situation, but Big Bill Williams was one of the "never say die" kind.

"They won't dar' to do any thing, boyees, I tell yer!" he exclaimed. "Leastways, I mean to cut short our thread of life, though I reckon, they air jest a-hungering arter that thing, worse than a starved wolf arter a lame buffler cow. But they won't dar' to spificate us, 'ur it would raise sich a rumpus that the noise would reach el'ar from hyer to Washington. I don't doubt that they will keep us shut up in this cussed hole fur a month or so, until there is a row raised 'bout it, and then they will dump us out without any ceremony."

But of course under the condition of their circumstances all speculation could only be vague and unsatisfactory, and so being practical fellows used to hard knocks as well as the smiles of fortune, they gave up conversation and composed themselves to sleep as well as they could upon the hard clay floor of their dungeon, and in spite of their uncomfortable surroundings they slept like tops until the morning sun was up, and the jailer bringing in their breakfast of beans and coarse bread aroused them.

The attendant was a gruff and surly fellow, not at all disposed to be communicative, but he said enough to lead the trappers to believe they would not be kept long in suspense in regard to their ultimate fate, for he intimated that their trial would take place that very morning.

"The sooner the better," Wallace remarked, after the jailer had departed, and the three attacked the coarse fare with the excellent appetite that nature gives to the sons of the border. "And while we wait hyer it's clear that they don't mean to starve us to death."

And so with jest and story these light-hearted fellows passed the time away until a strong guard entered the dungeon at noon and announced that they had come to conduct the prisoners to the hall of justice.

With alacrity, and just as cheerful as though they were going to a ball instead of to a courtroom to answer a charge of murder, the prisoners prepared to quit their cell.

Along through the street, thronged with staring Mexicans, men, women and children, all eager to behold the culprits, and many of them, miserable wretches, hurling curses upon the foreigners, the Americans were conducted to the judgment hall where the Alcalde sat in state.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### THE SENTENCE.

THE moment the trial commenced the Americans saw that everything had been arranged for their conviction.

The accusation was murder and all three were arraigned, Carson as the principal and his companions as accessories.

After the charge was made the Alcalde in his sternest manner asked the prisoners if they had anything to say in their defense.

"You go ahead, Bill," said Wallace, with a nod to his companion. "I reckon that you air a heap sight better at speechifying than I am, 'cos I have heerd it said that you once talked a Digger Injun clean out of his moccasins."

"It was a lie, Big-foot, it were a Flat-head buck and I argufied him right out of his skin, so that he looked like a white man," and then Williams addressed the Alcalde.

"You want to know ef we hev got anything to say fur ourselves," he began. "Wa-al, 'cad'y, the trouble is not to find things fur to say but to decide what *not* to say. In the furst place you air talking 'bout murder, but I reckon that thar ain't one on us has seen a dead man yit, and I take it cuss has got to cast up his chips and quit the game afore you kin say he is defunct and departed."

"You admit the crime then," remarked the official, with an awful frown.

"Admit blazes!" yelled the trapper, not at all in awe of the judge, "we don't admit anything, 'cept that the man ain't dead, or we don't know any man that we hev run foul of in the town who is, and if yer dead man drops out, whar's yer murder?"

"Enough, call the witnesses," the Alcalde commanded, and then a half a score or more gave their testimony, and a clear case the perjured villains made out against the Americans, for while some swore that all three of the strangers had attacked the Mexican bully, others swore that the wounds he had received were mortal and that he had died almost immediately after being removed from the scene of action.

The trappers listened attentively but their amazement at the falsehoods sworn to by the Mexicans soon turned to anger.

"It's all a cussed lie!" yelled Big Bill Williams at last, unable to contain himself longer. "Thar ain't a man-Jack o' yer all that has spit out two words o' truth since yer began! We could have salivated the cuss a dozen times, but we didn't, fur our little pard hyer downed him in a fair fight, axing no odds, and the big galoot was the feller that commenced the fuss too. He was in for a fight—he were jest a-

spilling for it and he got it—got full measure, heaped up and running over! But as to his being a gone sucker, that is all in your eye and Betty Martin! that story won't wash; why even a yaller dog would turn up his nose at it!"

"Be silent! you offend the dignity of the court with your clamor!" the official declared with great severity.

"Court! do you call this hyer ranch a court?" cried Wallace, unable to resist giving vent to his indignation. "You are all a set of cussed cut-throats and you know it too, durn yer yaller skins!"

There was a yell of rage from the spectators at this declaration, particularly as the angry trapper emphasized his words by shaking his manacled fist defiantly at these degenerate descendants of Montezuma.

"Silence, or we will gag you so that you cannot speak!" exclaimed the Alcalde at the top of his voice, and almost wild with rage at being thus defied by the bold trapper.

"Cut out my tongue, that is the best way or you want to make me keep quiet!" Wallace undauntedly replied. "You bloody butchers, ef we were only free and had our we'pons, we three could clean out yer hull town!"

Perceiving that it was impossible to terrify the lion-hearted Americans by threats, the Alcalde determined to bring the scene to an end immediately.

"Silence, prisoners, and listen with decency to the judgment of the court."

"Durn yer court and you too," growled Williams in an undertone.

"The court finds that you are all three guilty of the crime of murder as charged, and the penalty is death; therefore, as Alcalde of the town of Santa Fe, I sentence you to be publicly shot in the plaza of the town one month from to-day; the date is set thus distant because it is necessary for these proceedings to receive the approval of the Governor-general of this province, who is now at the capital."

Despite the fact that they were in the hall of justice, cries of "bravo, bravo!" mingled with curses hurled at the Americans, came from some of the rabble, the dregs of the town, who mortally hated the trappers, who on many occasions had administered well-merited punishment to the rascals.

From what the Americans knew of the Mexican officials and courts, they were prepared to expect almost anything, but the idea of a simple Alcalde of a town like Santa Fe presuming to sentence three prisoners to death was to the minds of the trappers utterly preposterous, and actuated by this feeling they absolutely laughed in the face of the Alcalde, much to his rage and disgust.

"Aha, you will try another tune when you look into the muzzles of the muskets!" he cried, grinding his teeth with rage, rising to his feet and shaking his fist at the others.

At this outburst the trappers only laughed still more, for they did not feel in the least alarmed. They were quite certain that the Governor-general of the province would not sanction such a verdict, and then too in a month there was ample time for their situation to become known to their countrymen, and even

if the American authorities were slow to move in the matter, some of the boys on the border would be sure to take it up, and if a sufficient force could not be got together to come boldly to Santa Fe, and release them by main force, then it would be easy enough to carry out a simple plan, as Williams suggested had been done before on two or three similar occasions; and that was, to seize a half-dozen prominent Mexicans, residing near the border, and hold them as hostages for the safety of the parties held in durance vile on the Mexican side.

"We will give you man for man, or body for body!" had been the stern ultimatum tendered by the bordermen on these occasions, and each and every time the Mexicans had "weakened" and released their prisoners.

Not much law about this sort of thing, but considerable justice.

The prisoners were conveyed back to the calaboose, the rabble following at their heels and hooting like so many demons.

"Oh, ef we only had our liberty and a knife apiece, how we would make this gang take to their heels for dear life!" Wallace muttered, sore at the abuse so freely lavished upon them.

And the prisoners were not sorry when they were securely locked in the prison again, for toward the end of the tramp, some of the wretches, growing bold, began to fling sticks and stones and clots of mud at the Americans, and most surely they would have been well pelted had it been possible for the rabble to fling the missiles with such accuracy as to hit the prisoners and miss the guards, but this was not possible, and the guards got the benefit of the sticks, stones and mud as well as the Americans, much to their disgust, so they put a stop to the performance by threatening to fire on the rabble if they did not desist.

"A month!" Big Bill Williams exclaimed, after they were left alone to their prison solitude; "bless yer souls, boyees, a mighty big heap of things can happen in a month."

And the other two agreeing with him in regard to this, three prisoners locked in a dungeon cell never had easier minds.

The day passed slowly away, the shades of evening came, the everlasting Mexican beans and corn-cakes were served, and then the prisoners were left to their own devices until the morning.

They made themselves as comfortable as possible under the circumstances, and Wallace was busily engaged in the recital of some strange adventures which had occurred to him the first time he had ever struck the Santa Fe trail, when they were disturbed by a slight noise, which seemed to come from the little grated window, high up in the wall of the cell.

"Hush! what is that?" inquired Williams, whose senses were always on the alert, like a true son of the wilderness.

"Some one at the window," replied Carson, whose hearing was wonderful keen.

"Some durned cuss trying to get a crack at us while we sleep, do you s'pose?" asked Wallace, suspiciously.

"Hist!"

Clear and distinct came the warning sound, and there was not the slightest doubt in the

minds of the three that the sound came from the lips of some one with face pressed against the iron bars which guarded the casement.

"Friend or foe, eh?" questioned Williams, in a cautious tone.

"More likely foe than friend," Wallace suggested, peering up at the window and trying to distinguish who it was.

"No foe, but a friend, for it is a woman, and I think I recognize the voice," the lad remarked.

"Hist, señor Americans," said the unknown.

"I was sure of it!" cried Carson, springing to his feet. "It is the pretty girl with whom I danced at the fandango, the innocent cause of all this trouble."

"Adam and Eve over ag'in," Wallace observed.

"How can I get up to speak to her?"

"Wallace and I will give you a boost," and by this device Carson's face was brought to a level with the barred casement.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### A GUARDIAN ANGEL.

As Carson had said, the speaker was a female, and now that he was face to face, he instantly recognized her.

It was the pretty girl who had danced with him at the fandango.

"Do not be alarmed; it is I, señor, Josephine Jarimilla."

"Yes, I thought I recognized your voice."

"Oh, señor American, you and your companions are in such terrible danger!" the girl exclaimed, plaintively. "I could not rest until I had speech with you. I am the niece of the Alcalde, and he is a horribly wicked man, and he is so determined to put you and your friends to death that he will not stop at any obstacle. Luckily I was enabled to overhear a discussion between the Alcalde and his chief officer, so that I am in possession of all his plans. I knew at this hour no one would be apt to be abroad, and I made up my mind to warn you of the danger that threatens. I knew that from the back of my house I could easily reach this window."

Carson was visibly affected by the devotion of the generous girl and did not hesitate to express to her his appreciation of her noble act, and at the same time he said that it was the opinion of his companions, as well as his own, that the Alcalde would not be able to execute the sentence which he had imposed, for the Governor of the province would never give his sanction to such a cold-blooded murder; and then too, the execution of himself and his friends would be certain to excite the Americans on the border to deeds of violence, and the Mexican officials with all their arrogance would think twice before doing anything to provoke the wrath of the United States.

"Oh, señor, he has no thoughts of letting the Governor decide in regard to your fate!" the girl exclaimed.

"Do you hear that?" asked Wallace of Williams. It was not necessary to put the question, for the big scout and trapper was listening with the most intense interest.

"Oh, yes, and the little girl is speaking square."

too, every time. These Greasers are ternal cusses, and they air going to git the under grip on yer every lick of so be as they kin."

"The Alcalde will surely not dare to put us to death without the sanction of the Governor!" Carson exclaimed, bewildered by the startling intelligence. "If he was to attempt such a bold game it would cost him his place most certainly, and he would be a lucky fellow if he got off with his life."

"He does not intend to do anything openly, but he bears such a hatred to all the men of your nation that he swears not one of you three shall ever leave this place alive," the maiden replied. "He knows very well that he has no authority to condemn you to death and that his superior authorities would call him to a strict account if he attempted to carry out the sentence; but he has shut you up here in order that others may have the opportunity to execute the or me he dares not carry out."

"But, I do not exactly understand—what is his purpose?"

"To-morrow his agents, all properly instructed by him, will go around among the people and attempt to stir them up to madness against you Americans. All the town were not at the fandango last night, and so all do not know the truth in regard to the event that happened there. The story that the Alcalde's agents will tell, is that the quarrel arose on account of you strangers getting intoxicated and insulting the Mexican ladies. That miserable ladron who forced you into a quarrel, and whom you so justly chastised, will be represented as a champion who interfered to protect the Mexican girls and who was assaulted, brutally beaten and then killed, being attacked by all three of you Americans at the same time."

"Durn my old boots!" exclaimed Wallace in disgust, "ef that ain't the biggest whopper that was ever hatched you kin take my pile!"

"The Greasers beat the world at a yarn; they are the champion liars!" his companion replied.

"But the big brute cannot be dead; he was not badly injured in any way," Carson remarked.

"That is the truth, for, excepting his bruises, he is as well as he ever was; but he is one of the Alcalde's right-hand men and at his orders he has taken himself out of the way for a while, so that the report that he perished from the result of his wounds can be spread abroad by the doctor who attended him, and who is also one of the Alcalde's creatures. This is his plot to excite the rage of the people, and then when they begin to clamor for vengeance, his agents are instructed to propose that the gates of the jail be forced and you three taken out by the mob and hanged to the nearest tree."

"The infernal old scoundrel!" muttered Wallace. "Ef I only had him hyer fer 'bout ten minutes, durned ef I don't believe I could grin him to death!" Big Bill Williams ejaculated.

"Of course if the mob take you out and put you to death, he will be able to say that he was not to blame, for he is not responsible for the acts of a mob. And then he has taken measures so that the villains will have a clear field. All the guards are withdrawn from around the prison, and to-morrow night, after dark, three

men are delegated to come after the two jailers who have charge of the prison, carry them off and make them drunk, so that they will not be able to give any information in regard to the matter, nor reveal who the ringleaders are in case they should be able to recognize them. With a stick of timber they will burst the doors open, then seize you and with ropes already provided hang you immediately. As the Alcalde said, such wretched heretics as you North Americans would not need the services of a priest."

"Ten minutes is all I want of him, right with my bar' fists, too," Wallace muttered. "Jest ten minutes, that is all I ask, and at the end of that time, arter I get through with him, he wouldn't need a priest either—nobody but a grave-digger."

"Nary time!" Williams cried; "old Mother Earth is too decent for sich a jackal; she'd heave an earthquake and h'ist him out. He wants to be put on the prairie whar the wolves and the buzzards could skin him clean."

"It is a fiendish plan!" Carson said, "but a just Providence will not surely permit such a scheme to be successfully carried out."

"No, you are right it will not, and the Great Ruler above has put it into my heart to try to save you from the malice of your enemies."

Wallace, at this, punched his companion in the ribs, and Big Bill Williams, in his glee, executed a sort of war-dance.

As for the lad he was so overpowered by this unexpected announcement that for a moment he lost the use of his tongue.

At last though, he managed to stammer:

"You are all goodness, senorita, thus to come to our rescue like an angel from the skies."

The maiden blushed, more at the expression upon the youth's face than at his words, but she quickly covered up her confusion by handing a small parcel, neatly done up, through the bars.

"Here is a package of small files," she said; "they are excellent tools, so the man said who sold them to me, and will cut through the stoutest iron as well almost as a knife through wood. These bars are very old and they cannot be very strong, for they have been here ever since the building was erected and it is one of the oldest in Santa Fe, built, oh, I don't know how many years ago, a hundred at the very least. I do not think it will take you very long to saw the bars so as to be able to get out through the casement and there is not the least danger of any one overhearing you when at work, for as I told you all the guards have been withdrawn."

"Oh, don't you be afraid, senorita!" cried Big-foot Wallace, who found it to be impossible to refrain from speaking any longer. "We'll make the rifle, every time now, thanks to you, bless yer pretty face! and though I ain't much of a praying man, durn me if I don't rattle with a prayer to-night arter I get out of this box, and all fur you, too, that you may be happy, live till you dry up and blow away, and git the nicest feller that walks on two legs on top of this yere airth for a husband."

The girl's face was covered with blushes as she listened to this speech, and now that her

mission was accomplished she prepared to withdraw.

"Good-by," she said to Carson, tears in her brilliant, black eyes as she spoke, "I hope that you will succeed in escaping from your enemies and in returning in safety to your own land, and if you do so, possibly we may never see each other again; but I trust that when safe in your home, you will not forget the Mexican maid who risked as few women in this world will risk, that you might be saved from the death which threatened you so nearly."

"I will never forget you, Josepha, while life remains!" the lad declared, tears standing in his eyes also, no sign of weakness though, but "honest water from the well of truth." Then bending forward, he imprinted a warm kiss upon the rich, red lips of the willing girl. "I will never forget you, and some day I will return to Santa Fe, and see if I cannot find some way to repay this service," he continued.

With a loud sob the girl hurried away.

That Carson kept this promise the reader will see before this over-true tale is ended.

With the files the prisoners soon relieved themselves of the chains which bound them and then proceeded to attack the bars which guarded the window.

The iron was soft, time had done its work, and soon the road to liberty was open.

#### CHAPTER XV.

##### A DARING DEED.

NEVER before did any one of the three breathe the free air of heaven with more satisfaction than after they had emerged from the confinement of the Mexican jail.

All without was still as dead; not a soul seemed to be stirring in the town.

"Now then, boyees," said Williams, as they walked away from the prison house, "what is to be the game, he?"

"To give leg-bail, I suppose, and git out of these yere diggings as soon as our legs will let us," Wallace replied.

"We are in a pretty bad condition to take the homeward trail," the lad suggested. "No money, no provisions, no ammunition and no weapons."

The three had been stripped clean by the Alcalde's orders after their arrest, and after the fashion common to such officials, the Mexican had appropriated all the valuables; and this was one reason, too, why he had been so anxious to get the Americans out of the way, for the booty had been a rich one. The weapons were valuable, and in addition all three had considerable money upon their persons.

"Wa-al, I reckon our outfit would break the back of a good-sized, healthy jack-rabbit," Williams remarked.

"Say, boys, it would only be the squar' thing if we should go through some Mexican and try to get bunk!" Wallace exclaimed.

"Are we likely to meet any one at this lonely time?" Carson queried. "And then, too, would it be hardly fair to make some innocent man suffer for the deeds of this rascally Alcalde?"

"That's so! true as preaching," Williams observed.

"If we could only run afoul of the Alcalde

himself now," and Wallace clinched his big fists as he spoke in a way that clearly boded no good to the Mexican official.

"Why not?" said Carson quietly.

"Why not what?" asked Wallace.

"Yes, what are you driving at? Got some mighty hefty scheme in that 'tarnal leetle head of yours?" Williams questioned.

"Why not go for the Alcalde and make him disgorge his plunder? We know his house, and it is generally easy to gain an entrance to these Mexican houses, for the doors are usually not very strongly secured. The chances are a hundred to one that he can be surprised, and I am not at all satisfied to get out of this town without my plunder," Carson replied.

"No more am I!" Wallace added.

"Wa-al, children, I'm in the same boat!" Big Bill Williams coincided, with one of his everlasting grins. "It's a bully big thing, and I am in for it, tooth and nail!"

Wallace instantly cried that he wished to be counted in, and then the three discussed the matter over as they proceeded to the Alcalde's domicile.

"We ain't got nary we'pon, though," Williams observed, as they halted outside the house of the official.

"He will have his weapons near at hand, and if we can only gain admission to his sleeping apartment without waking him, it will be easy enough to secure them," Carson replied.

"Skin the cuss with his own tools!" Wallace muttered.

Fortune in this instance most decidedly favored the bold. The Alcalde, being unmarried, kept bachelor's hall, his wants being attended to by a couple of servants, male and female, and on this eventful night, after the Alcalde had retired to rest, the two had stolen forth to participate in an all-night fandango held in the suburbs of the town.

The Mexican was a severe master, and as the servants knew he would never consent to their going, they did not take the trouble to ask him, but stole out, leaving the doors unbarred so as to be able to return without disturbing him. The Alcalde being much given to sleep, they knew there was little danger of their absence being discovered.

And so it happened that the three Americans, without any difficulty whatever, gained an easy entrance to the bedside of the Mexican official.

Elated with the triumph he had gained, and rejoicing over the rich booty which had so unexpectedly fallen into his hands, the Alcalde had drank deep that night, and had sought his couch in anything but a sober state. He had not taken the trouble to undress, but had lain down just as he was, with all his clothes on, even to his boots. And, for a wonder, he had not hidden away in the secure hiding-place which he had for his ill-gotten gains, the booty which he had taken from the Americans. In the intervals of his applications to the potent liquor he had gloated over the treasures he had acquired so easily, and, when he prepared to retire, he had thrust them under the mattress of the bed.

The moonlight was streaming in through the windows, affording plenty of light.

The Alcalde was known enough to remove his

weapons and placed them on a small table by the head of the bed before retiring, and these the Americans at once seized upon.

"Say, hadn't we better bind and gag the cuss furst thing?" suggested Williams.

"Oh, yes, gag him by all means; then he won't be able to raise an alarm. If he let a good big holler out of him, as he will be mighty apt to do when he discovers what distinguished visitors have called upon him, he might raise the neighborhood," Wallace remarked.

The long, gaudy scarf of the Mexican, the zone of bright colors which he wore around his waist, was hanging over the head of the bed. Carson possessed himself of it. Williams and Wallace took the sleeping man gently by the shoulders and raised him to a sitting posture, and so carefully was this movement performed that the Alcalde was not roused from his slumbers until Carson bound the scarf tightly around his mouth. Then opening his eyes, amazed at this rude treatment, he glared upon his captors.

The Mexican had slept long enough to allow the fumes of the liquor which he had swallowed to in a great measure pass away, and so, his head being clear, he instantly realized what had happened.

With a vigorous bound, so quickly executed that the trappers were for a moment taken by surprise, he sprung to his feet, but their strong hands were upon him in an instant, while Wallace flashed his own shining blade in dangerous proximity to his throat.

"Be keerful!" the American warned; "don't you go fur to try to cut up any didoes, or I'll slit yer windpipe jest like as if yer were a blasted snake!"

And in the eyes of the speaker the Alcalde read that he would surely be as good as his word if provoked to it.

"Now, Carson and Williams, you search the room and see if you kin diskiver whar he has stowed away our we'pons and plunder," Wallace continued.

Carson had his eyes upon the Alcalde's face as his companion spoke, and he noticed that when Wallace spoke of the booty the Mexican involuntarily cast a quick glance at the bed, and the lad from this instantly conjectured that the plunder was concealed somewhere about the bed, and he immediately made known his suspicion to his companions.

The awful scowl of rage that overspread the Mexican's face at once convinced the Americans that they were hot on the scent.

Search was instantly made, and the plunder discovered.

Highly delighted were our heroes when they came again into possession of their property, while the face of the baffled Alcalde was a study.

"Wa-al, we have got our own again," Williams remarked, "but how about this ornery cuss what wanted to cut our thread of life? What do you say, boyees, ain't we going to get squar' with him some way?"

Wallace reflected over the matter for a moment; it did not seem exactly right for the villainous Mexican to escape without punishment for the bloody work which he had so cunningly planned; then the trapper held a whispered conference with Carson, and at the end said:

"We have thought of a little racket, Bill, shall we go ahead?"

"Propel!"

"Then we must ask Senor Alcalde to come for a little ride with us."

Alarmed now for his life, fearing that the Americans meant to do him serious harm, the Alcalde attempted to resist, but he was speedily overpowered by the vigorous trappers, and then bound hand and foot with a lariat just as the Americans had been bound when surprised by the official and his men.

"Tit for tat," Williams observed, grinning in the face of the enraged Mexican; "one good turn deserves another. You gave us a taste of your hospitality, and now we'll give you a little slice of ours."

From the corral, where the horses were kept, four good animals were selected. The Alcalde was bound upon one, and the Americans mounted the others, and then the cavalcade set out.

Fortune favored the enterprise, and they managed to get out of the town without exciting observation.

And then, when they got some five miles from the town, they halted by a little grove of cottonwood, dismounted, and tied the Mexican to a tree, stripping off his upper outward garments, and then with some good stout switches flogged him until he howled for mercy in the most abject manner.

And this was the vengeance the trappers took upon the craven coward who had doomed them to a terrible death.

The thrashing over, the Alcalde was released, and he skulked off swearing all sorts of vengeance.

The trappers got off safely, but it was not until after the death of the whipped official, which took place about a year afterward, that any of them dared to visit Santa Fe.

## CHAPTER XVI.

AT BENT'S FORT.

A FEW years after the notable events described in our last chapter found Carson located at Fort William, or Bent's Fort, as it was commonly termed, situated on the north bank of the Arkansas river, about one hundred and fifty miles from the mountains, and established by the brothers Bent for the purpose of trading with the Mexicans of New Mexico and with the Indians of the Cheyenne and Comanche tribes.

Quite a number of expeditions had Carson been engaged in since the time of his last exploit, as before related, and the period when he arrived at Bent's Fort, and on each and every occasion he had won golden opinions from his companions, day by day his reputation increasing. Guide, hunter, trapper, Indian-fighter, it was difficult to say in which line he most excelled, being a master-hand at all.

And young as he was, when he heard that Bent's Fort was in need of a hunter to supply the Post with game, he was in no way afraid to apply for the situation; then, when Colonel St. Vrain questioned the modest and unassuming young man and learned that his name was Kit Carson, he immediately accepted him, for he knew him well by reputation.

No sinecure was this office, for generally there were about fifty men at the Post who depended for fresh meat solely upon Carson's skill.

Far and wide he wandered in search of game, sometimes being absent from the Post for a week at a time, but so great was the confidence his companions had in his skill and courage that they were never in the least alarmed at a prolonged absence on his part, being satisfied that he would turn up all right in the end.

Dangerous and difficult indeed were his hunts sometimes, particularly when the Cheyenne and Comanche Indians took it into their heads to chase game in the neighborhood of the fort.

By so doing they not only rendered the game scarce, and forced Carson to hunt at a greater distance, but they also did their best to entrap and kill the cunning white hunter whom they regarded as an interloper upon their territory. And as for the Post itself, although erected for the express purpose of affording them a good market for their furs and skins, yet they looked upon it with hostility and would gladly have exterminated the intruders if a favorable opportunity occurred.

But the traders were well aware of this, and whenever Indians in any number were admitted into the fort, loaded guns were kept trained upon them, ready to be discharged at the first sign of danger, and a mortal fear the savages had of these big guns.

And the fort too was quite a strong one, being so constructed that twenty or thirty determined men could easily hold it against four or five hundred, as long as the attackers were not provided with artillery.

The fort merely consisted of a square, inclosed by a 'dobe wall, six or eight feet thick and about twenty high, pierced at regular intervals with port-holes for cannon and loopholes for musketry.

But if the savages couldn't take the fort, they could at any rate capture the bold white hunter who rode forth as carelessly as though he owned every foot of the soil pressed by the hoofs of his mustang.

The Cheyennes were not as bad as the Comanches; this latter tribe, the great horse Indians, were an arrogant set of fellows at the period of which we write; ever since the time, to which the memory of man runneth not, they had lorded it over the prairie, almost without a rival, and year by year pushed back little by little the line of civilization on the south-east of their territory.

Instead of the Mexicans gaining ground they had lost and the wild grasses of the prairie had encroached upon field and orchard.

Carson, for all his apparent carelessness, was ever on his guard though, and easily succeeded in escaping a dozen well-laid traps which the cunning red-men had set for him.

So skilled was he in wood and prairie craft, so quick and subtle the instinct with which nature had gifted him, that he never failed to discover that the red-skins were lurking in the neighborhood of the fort no matter how cunningly they kept themselves concealed.

From the movements of the game, even, he could detect almost without fail whether the reds lurked in the neighborhood or not.

The game were shy and wild the chances

were a hundred to one that the savages had frightened them, and then Carson redoubled his caution.

One particular morning the hunter, after crossing Bear creek, had struck down toward the north fork of the Cimarron.

He had gone some distance from the Post, the game were particularly wild and from this as well as from some other signs which he had observed, he felt sure that the red-skins were in the neighborhood and in force too. Either a large hunting or war party. The buffaloes were now passing southward and it was possible that the Indians had come north on their annual hunt, although it was rather early for them, or it might be a war party who had dug up the hatchet and were about to make a foray into the country of the Cheyennes, north of the Arkansas river.

Eagerly Carson had looked for the Indian trail as he rode along, for so expert was he in reading signs of this description that he would have been able to tell had he encountered the trail whether it was made by a hunting or war party; but he was not fortunate enough to run across it.

The country was rugged and broken and the hunter was proceeding with extreme caution, for fear of coming unawares upon the red-skins, when in a little open glade he came upon a strange sight.

The glade was about a mile square and although there were scattered clumps of bushes here and there, it was free from timber with the exception of a half dozen scrub oaks in a cluster right in the center of the valley.

And in and around the oaks, as Carson came upon the scene, a most novel chase was going on.

A young Indian girl, pursued by a fierce buffalo bull, was taking advantage of the trees to escape from the infuriated animal.

The broken arrows still sticking in the bison's sides and the dead Indian's pony stretched upon the ground, his sides ripped open by the horns of the prairie king, were enough to reveal to Carson what had taken place before he had come upon the scene.

The girl had been out on a hunt, had encountered the buffalo and wounded him with her arrows, and although as a rule the red-skins are expert enough with their primitive weapons to drive a shaft clean through even the thick carcass of a buffalo, yet on this occasion the savage maid had failed to do so, and her steed, not being nimble enough to escape the rush of the infuriated beast, had been pierced by his horns and killed.

The girl, dismounted by the shock, had been lucky enough to reach the little clump of timber, but her bow had been forced from her hand and so she was helpless to injure her adversary.

And the bull mad with rage had no idea of giving up the chase, for he snorted with the pains of his wounds, although so far he had not been able to catch the girl who darted from tree to tree with wonderful swiftness.

But, unless some rescue came, there could be but one end to the struggle; in time exhausted nature must give way, the girl's strength would fail and the ~~strong~~-nated monarch of

the prairie wilderness would then trample her shapely limbs into a horrid mass, for it is the nature of a buffalo bull when once enraged never to give up while life remains.

The girl's breath was beginning to fail her when Carson appeared upon the scene and ten minutes more would surely have witnessed the triumph of the brute.

A glad cry came from the lips of the agonized girl when she beheld the hunter. Although he was a white-skin and she a red, yet she had perfect faith that he would come to her rescue.

And so had the buffalo bull too, for that master, who was almost as quick to discover the new-comer as the human, whom he had marked for his victim; and pausing in his fierce chase, cast his evil little eyes, now flaming "red with age, upon the horseman.

Carson, rifle in hand, ready for action, rode straight at the bull.

The beast waited until he came quite near and then with a fierce bellow charged upon him.

The hunter's well-trained steed easily avoided the attack and then as the angry bull lumbered by in his mad rush, Carson put a bullet into him right behind the shoulder that sapped the life of the bison upon the instant.

The bull pitched forward upon its fore-legs, then down upon its head, and then rolled over on its side, life extinct.

The girl watched the proceeding with breathless interest.

Many a mighty hunter had she seen but never a one to compare with this Nimrod, and, somehow, the Indian maid did not feel in the least alarmed, although between the plainsmen and the red-skins there was a great deal of bad feeling; but all through Carson's life there was that in his face that always inspired confidence.

And therefore the Indian girl stepped forward to greet the hunter without the least fear.

She was a beautiful girl, the fairest, red or white, that Carson's eyes had ever looked upon, tall, superbly formed, grace in every motion, beauty in every line.

"The white hunter came just in time to save the red girl from the fierce beast and she thanks him from the bottom of her heart," said the girl, speaking Spanish with perfect ease.

"I am glad to be of service to you," Carson responded, speaking in the same tongue. "But how comes it that you are here alone, far from your people, for you are a Comanche, if I judge rightly?"

## CHAPTER XVII.

### RUNNING THE GANTLET.

"I AM a Comanche, the Silver Bell, daughter of the great war-chief, White Buffalo of the Pecos," the girl replied.

Carson looked at the girl with a great deal of curiosity. Both the White Buffalo and his fair daughter were well known to him by reputation, although he had never happened to meet either of them until now.

The White Buffalo at this time was in the very height of his power, and possessed an influence over the men of his tribe far exceeding that of any other warrior, and it was not to be wondered at, for he was not only a

fighting man, but a statesman as well, and that section of the Comanche tribe over which he ruled had never been as prosperous as when under his control. And the Silver Bell was reputed to be without an equal among all the red girls of the prairie.

"The white hunter has saved the life of the Comanche maid, and she will not forget the service when the time comes for her to repay it," the Indian continued.

"How do you know that I may not be an enemy instead of a friend?" Carson demanded. "How can you tell but what I have saved you from the buffalo bull in order to carry you away with me a prisoner?"

"My life is yours; I am your slave if you want me," the girl replied, modestly, her eyes dropping before Carson's admiring gaze.

And then up in the air rose the wild Indian yell, reverberating over the plain.

The two, absorbed in conversation, had not noticed the dusky warriors stealing in upon them, and so the red-skins had been enabled to effect a complete surprise.

Carson grasped his weapons, and his first thought was to offer resistance, but when he saw that there were at least fifty warriors in the party, that they were within easy range, and had circled around so as to completely surround him, he understood that resistance was hopeless and would only lead to his instant slaughter, so he made a virtue of necessity and signified to the red-skins that he surrendered.

The hunter had fallen into the hands of a large hunting party, led by the old chief, White Buffalo, in person.

Despite the maiden's remonstrances and her explanations of how timely the hunter had come to her rescue and saved her from the fierce beast, the Comanches made Carson their prisoner and bore him off in triumph to where the main body had their village, on the North Fork of the Canadian.

Here the girl in anger sought her father and pleaded for the life of the white-skin, but the stern old chief was terribly enraged at the interest which the renowned boy hunter had excited in the breast of his favorite child, and he gruffly told her that he should not attempt to interfere with the will of the tribe, and if they decided to put the white man to death, as he had no doubt they would, for they regarded him as a thorn in their side which ought to be plucked out at all hazard, he should not attempt to persuade them to do otherwise.

Then the fierce Indian blood of the girl flamed up in a rage, and by all the gods sacred to the Comanche tribe she swore that not a hair of the hunter's head should be harmed.

The old chief laughed at this exhibition of anger, for he regarded it merely as the pique of a spoilt child.

The Comanches held a grand pow-wow in order to decide in regard to the prisoner's fate, and almost without a dissenting voice they came to the conclusion that Carson should die. He was the most dangerous white man that they had ever encountered, and the quicker he was got rid of the better, in their opinion.

But with that refinement of cruelty which displays in playing with the captured

mouse before devouring it, the red-skins determined to have some sport with Carson before they slaughtered him.

So, in the gravest manner possible, although they had resolved to put him to death, they told him that if he wished to take the chances of running the gantlet he might do so, and if he succeeded in escaping he might go free.

In running the gantlet, the prisoner passes down between two lines of braves, armed with various weapons, each one of whom does his best to wound the runner and yet not kill him.

The reds had made up their minds to trick Carson and not give him a fair show for his life, for fifty yards or so beyond, the line of warriors, in a little clump of timber, ten of the fleetest runners of the tribe were concealed, ready to burst out and intercept the prisoner if he succeeded in successfully running the gantlet.

Every soul in the village was on the ground to see the sport.

The signal was given and Carson, who was one of the swiftest runners that ever stripped for a race, started like an arrow from a bow.

A yell of surprise arose on the air, for the lad by his quickness had secured a most decided advantage.

With wonderful swiftness he ran, dexterously avoiding the blows aimed at him by the Indians, and the lookers-on perceived that it was more than probable he would succeed in running the gantlet without serious injury, but the old Comanche chief mentally chuckled when he reflected how surprised the white-skin would be when the band of warriors concealed in the bushes sprung upon him.

But there was more than one surprise in store for both Carson and the Indians that day.

Just as the lad reached the end of the line and with a fiendish yell the warriors with brandished weapons rose to intercept him, out from another clump of bushes, at right angles with the one wherein the chiefs had lain concealed, came the Indian girl mounted on a fleet mustang, armed too with Carson's weapons.

Being a hundred yards nearer to the running man than the bucks and mounted too, it was an easy matter for her to come up to the fugitive while the others were some distance away.

But to the astonishment of the yelling crowd, who whooped exultingly when they beheld the girl, instead of striking the fugitive down when she reached his side, she dismounted from the horse, gave the bridle into his hands, the weapons also, and in a twinkle Carson was up in the saddle and racing away at headlong speed.

No horse was there in the Comanche nation who could overtake the mustang of the Silver Bell with such a start.

Brief as had been the interval between the dismounting of the girl and the ascent of Carson to the saddle, yet there had been time for the exchange of a few words between the two.

"Mount and ride!" she had cried when she sprung from the horse; "fear not! the steed lives not on prairie soil who can overtake my beauty!"

"But they will kill you!" Carson had replied.

hesitating to accept the act, although he felt sure that it was his only chance for life!

"They will not dare; you saved my life and it is only right I should return the favor; it is life for life!"

There was no more time for words and Carson accepted the service in the same frank spirit in which it was offered.

A yell of anger came from the throats of the Indians as Carson rode off.

A rush was made for the horse corral and within five minutes there were a hundred mounted warriors in full pursuit.

Vain the effort for the young scout escaped without the least difficulty.

The rage of the Indians was great and it was as much as the great medicine-man of the tribe, with whom the girl was a great favorite, could do to keep her from being instantly put to death, for even the White Buffalo raised his club to strike her down.

But it was finally determined that she should not be punished without a trial and so she was made a prisoner.

When night came though she succeeded in eluding the vigilance of her guards and made her escape. Straight to Bent's Fort she went and astonished Carson by presenting herself before him.

Brief was the story she told. Her father had disowned her, the tribe threatened to kill her and she had come to dwell with the white man and be his slave.

Now although in Carson's mind there yet dwelt a remembrance of the dark-eyed Mexican maid, yet he would have been either more or less than mortal, not to have returned the love which this young, innocent maid tendered so freely.

The commander of the Post was sent for, the circumstances related to him, and then in presence of all the residents of the Post Carson took the Silver Bell for his squaw.

Two days afterward the White Buffalo at the head of a large war-party rode up to demand his daughter.

Carson refused the request, the chief talked long and the interview finally ended with an arrangement for the hunter to meet in single fight the White Buffalo, the maiden's fate to be decided by the issue.

It looked like an uneven contest, and so it was, but not uneven in the way most imagined, for with a single rifle-shot Carson tumbled the old chief off his mustang and put him out of fighting trim for many a long day.

From that time forth the Comanches regarded Carson as being the greatest fighting-man that they had ever encountered.

#### CHAPTER XVIII. GUIDING A TRAIN.

A short time after the stirring event detailed in our last chapter, Carson was dispatched by Colonel St. Vrain to guide the annual supply train which came each spring to refurbish the fort.

On this occasion the train was an unusually large one and as the Indians in the neighborhood of the fort had been rather ugly all through the winter, the commander of the Post

feared that they might be tempted to attack the train, for the red-skins well knew how rich was the plunder it contained, therefore he determined to put the outfit in charge of the best man that could be found, and after long consultation with his associates the colonel came to the conclusion that, despite his youth, no better captain could be found on the western border than Kit Carson.

The importance of the task confided to his care had been duly impressed upon the youth, and it was with a full sense of the responsibilities resting upon him that Carson accepted the trust.

Along the old Santa Fe trail, as it was termed, Carson conducted the train, the way leading by the bank of the Arkansas, over the same route now followed by the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe railroad.

It was in the pleasant month of May, a delightful time for such a journey, and all went well until the basin, or sink, of Bear Creek was reached, and then Carson, riding along a little in advance of the train as was his usual custom when on the march, caught sight of some little black specks which seemed to be in motion over the distant prairie swells.

He pulled up his mustang, shaded his eyes with his right arm, the hand of which grasped his trusty rifle and gazed earnestly to the westward, while behind him the "prairie schooners" of the outfit trailed like a huge black and white snake over the flower-sprinkled prairie.

"Injuns, or I'm a Dutchman!" cried young Kit Carson as he looked toward the western border.

And the keen eyes of the young scout had not deceived him, either, for soon he could distinguish the gleam of Indian lances in the beams of the morning sun.

The alarm had been instantly given when the guide felt sure that there was danger, and the outfit immediately prepared for battle.

The Indians were in force and there wasn't much doubt that they meant mischief.

The wagons were "parked" after the fashion common to the frontier in such cases, that is, arranged in a circle, with the tongue of each wagon lashed to the hind part of the wagon before it, thus forming a regular fortification, and in the center of the circle all the horses and beeves were placed, for in Indian attacks upon prairie trains it is always the first endeavor of the red-skins to run off the stock, thus compelling the abandonment of the wagons.

There were twenty men all told in the train, but of the twenty only ten were regular prairie fighters who could be depended upon to the death in such a contest as this that threatened.

The Indians rode up, whooping exultingly, for they anticipated an easy victory, and not without reason, for there were two hundred warriors in the party, Apaches of the Colorado river, led by three of the best chiefs in the nation, Serape Colorado, Big Black Kettle and Little-man on-horseback.

This expedition had been planned by Serape Colorado—who was a brother of Mangas Colorado, the chief who had been handled so roughly by Carson in the San Francisco mountains—for the express purpose of capturing the train, and the chief had assembled such a force as he

thought would overpower the pale-faces at the first rush.

But as it is a cardinal principle with these dusky warriors never to resort to force if cunning will answer the same purpose; so instead of rushing forward to the attack after completely surrounding the train, Serape Colorado called for a "talk."

And the chief was somewhat disgusted, too, when Carson stepped forward to converse with him, upon discovering that the renowned young hunter, scout and guide was in command.

The Indians are greatly given to superstition and already they had got an idea that Carson's "medicine" was so good that no human skill could prevail against it.

But the buck was a stubborn young warrior, with a good deal of confidence too in his own "medicine," and he had taken too much trouble, and had too many men at his back to retire now without a fight, simply because the renowned young white man was in charge of the party.

But the chief did his best, though, to induce the guide to withdraw with his men and yield the wagons up without a struggle, promising that the whites should be allowed to depart without hindrance.

Carson rejected the offer in contempt. Even if he had an idea that the fight was sure to be a hopeless one, and that they would all be put to death at the end of it, yet he knew well enough that there was not the slightest dependence to be placed upon the Indian's pledges, and that if they came out from the shelter of the wagons it would only be to yield themselves, helpless, to the weapons of the savage foe; therefore, if death was certain, it was better to die like brave men, selling their lives as dearly as possible.

"Your blood be upon your own heads, then!" cried the Indian, in a rage as he turned away and rode back to his dusky troopers.

It was plain that the booty they coveted was not to be won without a bloody fight, and the chief would much rather have secured the spoils by artifice and cunning.

Carson had taken all the precautions that mortal man could take, and when the red storm of battle burst upon the whites they were ready for it.

With that reckless bravery that the warriors of the Apache nation have displayed on so many well-fought battle fields the red-skins charged in line of battle right up to the wagons, assailing the circle upon every side; but there was not a point unguarded, and the moment the savages came within rifle-range the whites opened up on them, and as the red-skins, perforce, became huddled together as their line closed in upon the wagons, nearly every shot told, while the whites, protected by the shelter the vehicles afforded, suffered but little damage from the far inferior weapons of the attacking foe.

Then, too, as fast as the whites discharged their rifles they cast them aside and grasped others, for one of the wagons was loaded with new weapons for the use of the Post, and Carson, upon the first sign of danger, had caused all the rifles and pistols to be loaded ready for use.

So the twenty men had three rifles apiece, and three to four pistols.

Sixty rifle-shots were poured into the yelling foe, fifty out of the sixty doing material damage, but in spite of the terrific fire, the Indians, with really wonderful courage—courage such as few veteran soldiers would have been likely to exhibit under the circumstances, charged right up to the wagons, but being received with a perfect storm of pistol-balls, each white having two braces of pistols and discharging them point-blank in the faces of the Indians, the red-skins would have been more than human to have persisted in the attack; they broke and fled in wild confusion, each and every buck running for dear life.

It was the worst defeat that the Apaches had received for many a long day, for when they gathered together again at a safe distance from the wagon-fort and counted up their losses, they found that ninety odd men had fallen in the fight, either killed outright or so badly wounded as to be disabled from further service, fifty horses had been killed, and many of the bucks were bleeding from wounds more or less severe.

But one opinion was now among the Indians, and that was that Carson's "medicine" was too powerful for any red-skin to hope to overcome it.

It was plain that the expedition was a failure and the quicker they got away from the scene of their defeat the better, but there was one bull-headed brave who disagreed with the rest, and this was the old chief, known as the "Little-man-on-horseback."

He was not satisfied—he had escaped without a scratch, and he did his best to persuade his brethren to try another attack, but the Apaches were not hogs and had got all they wanted.

Then, in a spirit of bravado and in order to show the warriors how much more of a man he was than any chief among them, he rode forth, and approaching the wagons challenged Kit Carson to come out and meet him in single fight.

Carson was just at that age when it is hardly possible for a fellow to resist the inclination to punish a boaster and a bully, and so he promptly accepted the challenge.

Both were armed with rifles and they rode around each other in a circle, each waiting for a favorable opportunity to fire, while the rest of the foemen, both red and white, looked on with eager interest.

Carson reserved his fire, and the savage at last, getting within range, came the old Indian dodge of throwing himself half off his horse, concealing himself behind the body of the animal, only a toe and a hand being visible, while he discharged his rifle from under the neck of the steed.

But Carson was on the watch for just such a movement, and the moment the Indian began it, he fired, aiming at the horse.

The mustang, stricken to the heart, fell over on its side dead, crushing the warrior under him in such a manner as to knock all idea of warfare out of him.

And thus easily Carson scored another victory.

The Indians retreated, and the train went on, and in due time was piloted by Carson safely into Bent's Fort.

All the frontier rung with the news of this exploit and with one accord all pronounced Kit Carson to be without a rival on the plains.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### IN AFTER YEARS.

It is not possible within the limits of such a work as this to relate one-tenth part of the exploits of such a hero as Kit Carson. The story of his adventures among the Crows and the Blackfeet up in the far North-west alone would fill a volume.

With only a companion or two he trapped all through the Nor'-west country, despite the savage attacks of the Indians, who had sworn that no pale-faces should hunt or trap within their domain; and many were the forays the merciless red-skins made upon the intruders, and gallantly always the savages were beaten off.

Kit Carson did not long enjoy the society of his squaw wife, the Silver Bell of the Comanches, for shortly after giving birth to a daughter, she died.

The young scout sorrowed after her for a long time, for he had learned to truly love the simple child of nature, who had given up home, friends and kindred for him.

After a lapse of years chance threw him in the way of Fremont, then engaged in an exploring expedition, and he accepted the position of guide to the command; right well he performed his duties, winning new laurels, and when this perilous adventure was over, his untiring thirst for "fresh fields and pastures new" led him again down into the South-west, where he thoroughly explored the Gila country, despite the opposition of the Apaches, who did their best to drive the bold white men out of the domain that they claimed as their own, but as usual Carson's "medicine" was too much for them, and the red-skins, after suffering severely, were compelled to give up their designs.

Then came the war with Mexico, and General Kearney induced Carson to go with him as guide with an expedition intended to conquer California. With Fremont, Carson had pretty thoroughly explored the country, and a better man could not have been found.

It was something of a trial, too, for Carson to accept the appointment, for, after the death of his Indian wife, the memories of the dark eyes of the young Mexican girl, who had so signally befriended him, had come up afresh, and as a result he had journeyed again to Santa Fe; there he found that the girl had remained so constant to the affection which he had inspired in her bosom, that she had rejected all offers of marriage.

Carson now was in quite a different position to that which he had occupied when he had first encountered the Mexican maid, and Santa Fe had changed, too, for the once hated North Americans had assumed control, and our hero had no difficulty in telling his soft tale, and was a thriving woorer.

So Josepha Jarimilla became Mrs. Kit Carson, and to the day of his death the guide

blessed the good fortune which had brought him and the dark-eyed beauty together.

He had just returned home to Taos after a long absence with Fremont in California, when General Kearney sought his services.

Although he had been anxiously looking forward to enjoying the delights of home after his long absence, yet he was not the man to hesitate, or hold back, when his country called upon him, and so he accepted the commission.

Kearney had only a small force, but pushed forward with reckless bravery, marching straight for San Diego, on the coast, where he was to make a junction with Commodore Stockton.

On the way, however, and while some distance from the coast, the general received information that a body of Mexicans had occupied an Indian village directly on the line of march, with the intention of disputing the progress of the invaders.

Kearney, with the reckless gallantry so characteristic of him, at once determined to attack, although Carson took the liberty of remonstrating strongly against it, for the troops and animals were completely tired out by the long march, and were not in any condition to offer battle.

The general though, like many another man in a like situation, underrated the courage of the foe, and thought it would be an easy matter to put to flight the "cowardly Mexicans," but the Californians are a bold and hardy race, as Carson well knew, altogether different from the Mexicans of southern Mexico, and so he represented to the general.

Kearney was both rash and obstinate, however, and the command was hurried on to the attack. For a time it seemed as if the reckless bravery of the Northerners would succeed, but, as Carson had predicted, the horses gave out, the Mexicans rallied, the first surprise over, and after a bloody conflict Kearney was forced to retreat, leaving fully one-half of his force upon the field.

The Mexicans followed up their advantage with a sharp and severe pursuit, the retreat of the Americans degenerating, at last into a regular rout, and had it not been for Carson and a half a dozen plainsmen who chanced to be with the party, it is doubtful if one would have been left to tell the tale.

But Carson and his companions, used to Indian-fighting, secured a strong position on the west of a little hill, from whence the Mexicans found it was impossible to dislodge them, and so gave time for the troops to rally.

The retreat was stopped, but the position of Kearney and his men was critical in the extreme, for the pursuit had changed into a siege; the Mexicans surrounded them on all sides, and though the foe was not able to take the position by storm, so strong was it naturally, yet by waiting a surrender would surely be compelled, for the Americans had very little food, and water enough only for a single day.

From this terrible situation there was only one chance of escape. Commodore Stockton lay at San Diego with a large force; if it was possible to get word to him of the perilous situation of Kearney's command, he would instantly send relief.

Some one must undertake the forlorn hope—some daring soul must endeavor to creep through the Mexican line, under the cover of the darkness, and then lie to San Diego.

And Carson was the man who volunteered for the perilous enterprise.

The night was so still, not a breath of air stirring, the slightest sound seemed to linger on the air,

and the laughter and light talk of the Mexicans, gloating over the prey which they felt sure could not escape them, came distinctly to the ears of the beleaguered men.

Luckily there was no moon, and this aided the bold adventurer.

About nine o'clock, Carson stole out of the camp and set about his dangerous task. He had started thus early, for he reasoned that the Mexicans would not be apt to be so much on their guard as at a later hour, which nine men out of ten would have selected for such an enterprise.

The foe had thought of such an attempt though, and a complete chain of sentinels encircled the hill.

With the utmost caution, Carson proceeded on his way, halting every now and then to listen to the sounds in the air, striving to discover the positions of the sentinels as they walked their beats.

And in this Carson succeeded, thanks to the careful training of his wild life, which had, in a great measure, given him the keenness of hearing and the clearness of sight of a wild animal.

He succeeded in passing the picket line without discovery, but on making a detour to avoid the Mexican camp he encountered a mounted Mexican, an officer who was riding forth to inspect the picket line, it being under his command.

Carson dropped noiselessly to the ground and flattened himself out on the earth like a huge frog.

The officer came slowly along, humming an air from some opera, his thoughts, probably, fixed on the girl he had left behind him.

He would have passed Carson without discovering him, although coming near enough to the prostrate man for Carson to reach out and touch the horse, had he not taken into his head just then to dismount and light his cigarette.

And as he dismounted right at Carson's side, his foot happened to touch the prostrate man.

"*Voo a brios!*" he muttered, his curiosity excited by the soft substance which his foot had touched, "what in the name of all the saints is this?"

He stooped to examine, and, as he did so, Carson grabbed him by the throat, determined to prevent him from giving the alarm, for he knew that a single cry from the Mexican's lips would surely bring all the foe upon him.

The guide was a man of iron muscles, and having taken the officer at a disadvantage, succeeded in choking him into insensibility, despite his struggles, and then stripping off his outward garments he donned them, together with his hat, mounted the horse, which being a well-trained beast, had remained quietly at hand, and rode away.

Thanks to this piece of luck Carson reached San Diego in safety, was furnished with two hundred men by Stockton, whom he conducted to the relief of Kearney, arriving just in time, for the general, in despair, was thinking of surrendering.

Page after page—might we fill with the recital of Kit Carson's daring deeds even in this short war.

Then as Indian Agent he had a glorious career, for the red-men both feared and respected him, and in the war of the rebellion the guide, in his old age, struck right well for the stars and stripes and the union blue.

A great man! and when he died the nation mourned! Many names are there glimmering bright on the roster-book which bears the names of our country's heroes, but none brighter nor fairer than that of the heroic guide, honest, noble Kit Carson.

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